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By Xiao Rong

A 200,000-word report on tax reform in rural China has become a best seller nationwide. The report, by two writers from the Hefei Federation of Literary and Art Circles, seems to have tapped into widespread concerns about the problems of "agriculture, countryside and peasants" in the world's biggest agricultural country.

China Peasant Survey was first published in December in the Beijing literary magazine, *The Contemporary Era*.

The People's Literature Publishing House then re-issued the report in January, with an initial print-run of 30,000 copies, which quickly sold out. The second impression of 70,000 continues to enjoy hot sales, according to the publishing house. "The printing of 100,000 copies to date is quite remarkable for a book dealing with a subject that is not so market-oriented," editor of the book Liu Haihong told *Beijing Today* Monday.

For the authors Chen Guidi and Chun Tao, from Hefei, capital of Anhui Province, the popularity their book has achieved is unexpected. "The publishing of the book has really been full of twists and turns. We just think it's so lucky that our work is accessible to the public and has attracted such attention," Chen told *Beijing Today* in an interview last Thursday.

The book and its status as a best seller has attracted widespread media coverage. In its 2004 special New Year issue, *Southern Weekend* paid tribute to the authors for their "honesty, perseverance and sincere concern for the subjects of their investigation," and said the book should "make professional journalists feel ashamed."

A reader posted a comment on people.com, the website of *People's Daily*, stating, "Every one of our reporters and editors must have met any number of peasants seeking our help. Even if we could not really do something to change their fate, we could at least cry out for them with our pen. These two writers have accomplished what we journalists should have done. Because of this book, we have no excuses for our silence and neglect."

Sina.com serialized the story and has invited the authors on two occasions to answer questions in on-line forums. The two have also been interviewed on at least three different programs for China Central Television, as well as for other media.

Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV commented that the book was "published at the right time," as it preceded the issuing of a key document by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on February 9, which calls for efforts to be made to boost the growth of farmers' incomes. The so-called "No. 1 document" outlines a series of preferential policies aimed at lightening the economic burden of peasants.

Chen Guidi expressed excitement about the issuing of the No. 1 document, but said, "it's just a coincidence" that it was issued not long after the publishing of the book. "I don't think there are any connections between the document and our book, but we do hope that our book could be accessible to some top government officials to help them handle problems in the rural areas."

Editor Liu Haihong told *Beijing Today* that the publishing house was deeply impressed by the first draft, which they received last June, although the original pungency and sharpness was later toned down. "We didn't promote this book as we usually do for those popular books. The reason that it has received such acclaim is not only because of the seriousness of the subject, but also because of the sense of social responsibility shown by the two authors," she said.

In the view of Liu, the flood of media coverage is a spontaneous reaction, not the result of commercial promotion.

Zhang Hulín, a researcher who studies the problems faced in China's rural areas, maintains that *China Peasant Survey* objectively reflects life in China's rural areas.

"The core problem in China is actually the problem of 'agriculture, countryside and peasants,' which has existing for a long time," Zhang told *Beijing Today*. "The book will provide both alarming information about the countryside to our top officials and firsthand material for academic research."

As one of the subjects interviewed by the authors, Lu Xueyi, a researcher at the sociology institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, described the book as having offered "bloody facts and typical cases about tax reforms in rural areas."

Though the report has certain limits in its depth, says Lu, it can still serve as a good reference for his study of the entire process of China's tax reform in rural areas.

"The book should be regarded as a panoramic account of the problems of Chinese peasants in the late 20th century. As a record of the history, its value is beyond question."

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Rural Survey a Best Seller



An investigation into the lives of peasants in Anhui Province has become an unexpected hit

"We speak out for China's 900 million peasants"



Chen Guidi

**Interview with the authors of
*China Peasant Survey***

By Xiao Rong

Beijing Today: Who are the target readers of your book, and why did you write it?

Chun Tao: We wrote this book mainly for readers living in cities, because city residents nowadays tend to have very limited or even no idea about how peasants live. Some city dwellers have prejudices against or sympathies for peasants, though they don't understand life in the countryside.

It is also for policy makers, especially senior government officials. We hope it might help them learn about the real life of peasants and then map out policies that are beneficial to farmers.

BT: Why did you choose the subject "agriculture, countryside and peasants?"

Chen Guidi: Writing about the peasants and the countryside is just writing about our own life, because both Chun Tao and I were born in rural areas. I left the countryside at nine while she left at the age of 11. Lots of our relatives are still living in the countryside.

Chun Tao: When Chen Guidi started to write reports on this issue in 1993, we began to realize that only when our works focused on social hot spots can they be welcomed by the

public. Since then we decided to speak out on behalf of a disadvantaged group. As writers, we just hope to take up our social responsibilities by describing real life in the countryside.

It's just by instinct and out of empathy that we chose this subject.

BT: How did you manage to collect all the first-hand material? Was it difficult to win the trust of peasants?

Chun Tao: We collected materials mainly from three channels, talking with local farmers, meeting with local officials in Anhui and interviewing experts in agricultural study.

At first it was not easy to communicate with peasants, as they just didn't believe we could help them. Some of them didn't dare to speak with us. But we treated them equally and invited them to our hotel to eat with us. We usually took long-distance buses or tractors when visiting. Our sincerity and respect for them made them believe in us.

As to government officials, it's more difficult to get real information from them. Peasants are more simple and frank, as long as they trust you, they will tell you the truth. While some officials just avoided meeting us altogether. Luckily, we got important clues from some insiders and some restricted documents also helped us.

BT: Have you come under any pressure while writing the book? Were you afraid for your personal safety at any time?

Chun Tao: During our investigation, we were sometimes watched and shadowed by local officials. As we have criticized the dark side of the countryside in Anhui, some local officials are not happy. Some officials, who were our friends before, don't speak to us anymore. Up till now, we have been accused by Zhang Xide, Linquan County Party Secretary, of damaging his reputation.

This has been the first lawsuit that either of us has faced.

We have no regrets about writing the book, but my only worry is that my four-year-old child might be at risk. He is now in the care of one of our neighbors.

Chen: But there are also some local officials who have shown support for our work. One official even called us after reading the book and said, 'Not all politicians are cold-blooded.' Most feedback we have received has been encouraging. A reader from Qingdao even suggested we organize a peasants' union to safeguard their rights.

Two lawyers who are now helping us fight the lawsuit told us, "You spoke out for the 900 million peasants in China, and we will speak for you two."

BT: Do you consider your book to be objective? Some comments about it suggest you speak in favor of the central government leaders while criticizing the grassroots officials.

Chun: Lots of people feel disappointed because they only witnessed the bureaucraticism and crudeness of grassroots officials. Actually it's not only the fault of these officials. The core problem lies in China's bureaucratic system. As far as we know, some senior officials do want to make some practical changes and make the country better.

BT: How did you fund your investigation? Was there any outside sponsorship?

Chun: We conducted the survey entirely by ourselves. Over the three years we worked on it, we spent over 50,000 yuan of our own money. And we are now facing a lawsuit demanding compensation of 200,000 yuan.

BT: The book uses a very plain style of language, quite devoid of literary devices, why did you choose this kind of writing style?



China Peasant Survey examines the implementation and effects of tax reforms in rural areas of central China's Anhui Province, one of the country's 12 agricultural provinces. Of the three rural reforms carried out in China since the 1980s, namely linking remuneration to actual output, land reform and the rural tax reform, the first two were trialed in Anhui.

After visiting over 50 counties in Anhui, the authors revealed behind-the-scenes news concerning local lawsuits involving peasants. Real names are given for most of the interviewees, regardless of whether they are local farmers or senior officials.

The book also analyzes the origin and development of rural tax reforms through interviews with scholars and officials studying the problems of "agriculture, countryside and peasants."

The rural tax reform, which has been trialed in several provinces since 2000, aims to alleviate the economic burden of peasants. According to statistics given in *China Peasants Survey*, the annual income of peasants is one sixth of that of city dwellers, while they pay four times more tax than city dwellers.

Photos by Photocom



Chun Tao

Chen: An excellent writer of reportage should first be an excellent journalist, possessing the courage to tell the truth. So in writing the book, we deliberately avoided a literary style, especially in the latter part. We are more like a politician or economist in the first section, and speak from the point of view of a historian later.

Chun: The book is filled with our deep empathy for the peasants, but at the same time we tried to describe objectively and rationally what we have seen in the countryside. This is why we used a simple and straightforward style of writing.

BT: What are your expectations regarding the future of China's rural areas?

Chen: My ideal is that there will be no countryside at all in China. In some developed countries in the west, there are no peasants, but rather employees assume duties of farming work. So the problems of "agriculture, countryside and peasants" are in this respect unique to China.

Chun: I just wish that Chinese peasants could lead a carefree life in the future, though that will not be easily realized. In our book, we just described the true situation of current life in the countryside, hoping it could arouse general concern about the problem.

Photos by Sheng Jiabeng

Beijing Outlines 2004 Development Goals

By Yu Shanshan

The second session of the 12th Beijing People's Congress and the Beijing People's Political Consultative Conference have both been underway this week. The six-day Congress, which closes Saturday, and the five-day Conference, which ended Thursday, will outline Beijing's development goals in 2004 and choose a new mayor.

Delivering the government work report at the opening of the congress Monday, acting mayor Wang Qishan said the municipal government is determined to achieve nine percent growth in gross domestic product this year, and the city would also see a rise of 13 percent in annual revenue.

Beijing is facing a more serious employment problem in 2004 than in 2003, with 230,000 local farmers and a further 200,000 migrant laborers expected to arrive in the city looking for work, according to local labor and social security authorities. The acting mayor has vowed to create 100,000 new jobs in local residential communities this year, and the municipal government would work to maintain the re-employment rate for registered jobless in urban districts above 60 percent and to maintain the rate of the registered unemployed below 2.5 percent.

Beijing's city planning has been one of the key topics of discussion at both meetings. On Tuesday, the new "Beijing urban space development strategy," a strategic adjustment of Beijing's urban layout, was released. According to the document, the city's layout will be adjusted, turning Beijing from a single-centered "super municipal-

ity" into a "double-axis, double-zone and multi-centric" city so as to lessen traffic pressure.

Wang said that according to the new pattern of "two lines, two rings, multicenter," Beijing municipal planning is expected to be completed within 2004, and will emphasize the city's status as national capital, international metropolis, cultural center and a convenient place to live. In 2004, the development scale of real estate will be appropriately controlled, and the cultural relics of the ancient capital will be properly protected in the initial layout.

Wu Shixiong, director of Beijing Finance Bureau said in a report to the Congress Tuesday that in 2004, the municipal government would invest 4.48 billion yuan in infrastructure and an extra 1 billion yuan for Olympic Games construction.

Presenting the draft of the 2004 national economic and social development plan to the congress Tuesday, director of Municipal Development and Reform Commission Ding Xiangyang said Beijing will transfer government investment from downtown to satellite cities and counties, and from real estate to high-tech, modern manufacturing and the service industry.

Regulations and operational methods for mergers and acquisition of enterprises will be further upgraded this year to make it more convenient for foreign investors to take part in urban infrastructure facility construction and state-owned enterprises restructuring, according to the report by the acting mayor.



Opening ceremony of the Beijing People's Congress at Beijing Conference Center on Monday. Photo by Cheng Tieliang

FAO Praises Bird Flu Measures

By Sun Ming

A senior animal disease expert with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), investigated Long'an County in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Wednesday.

Long'an County is where China's first highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of the bird flu virus was confirmed.

Speaking to media later, the expert, Laurence Gleeson, said, "On the basis of one investigation, I can not come to too many conclusions. However, the principles of control of avian influenza appear to be closely followed in this particular case."

To date, the H5N1 strain has been confirmed in 15 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions in China.

The government has taken a series of measures to contain the spread of the disease, including culling poultry in the affected

areas, imposing quarantine restrictions, setting up nationwide networks for animal vaccination and surveillance, as well as moving to extend compensation to areas hit by bird flu.

The Ministry of Agriculture has established 300 disease surveillance stations and 147 stations along the country's borders and disease diagnostic labs have also been set up at provincial and ministerial levels to develop emergency plans and technical standards for controlling the disease.

Xinhua reported Wednesday that the Beijing municipal government is stepping up control over wild and migratory birds.

The State Forestry Administration has sent a letter to its municipal counterpart, pledging further assistance to help control the movements of wild birds, which are feared could spread the disease. There are more than 350 kinds of wild birds, including some 250 kinds of migratory birds, in the Beijing area.



Local residents slaughter 1,200 chickens at Meishifang chicken farm in Chapeng, a village in Haidian District on February 6. Photo by Wei Hai

Over 1.2 million fowl have been killed in China so far to contain the bird flu outbreak.

Meanwhile, poultry raising and processing enterprises will be exempted from paying income tax in 2004 and fowl processing enterprises will have their value added taxes refunded for the period of February 1 to July 31,

according to the notice.

The central government has also urged banks to postpone withdrawal of due short-term loans from poultry raising and processing enterprises, pledging fiscal support to cover half of the interest on loan extension for a period of up to six months.

(Xinhua Source)

Measures Taken to Prevent Disease Entry

By Wang Xiaoxiao

China has taken strict measures to prevent the entry of foot-and-mouth disease following its recent outbreak in neighboring Vietnam and Mongolia.

The State Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine has urged relevant departments to strictly prohibit any direct or indirect import of animals considered a risk, and related products from the two countries. Products that have already arrived in the country should be sent back or destroyed.

Swine and cattle, from Vietnam and Mongolia are prevented from entering China through

mail or by being brought in by tourists as well. Should products of those animals be discovered on ships, planes or other vehicles, they must be sealed up immediately.

Foot-and-mouth disease is highly infective and at the official website of the ministry, www.aqsig.gov.cn, there is further detailed information available about the epidemic situation.

According to the latest reports, over 2,000 cattle have been infected with foot-and-mouth disease in Vietnam's central Quang Nam Province, and more than 100 cattle have died from the disease in Mongolia.

Moon Project Launched

By Yu Shanshan

China has started the first phase of its lunar probe program with funding of 1.4 billion yuan, as preparations get underway to put a satellite in orbit around the moon by 2007.

Sun Laiyan, general secretary of the Commission of Science Technology and Industry for National Defense made the announcement last Friday.

Sun, who is also deputy director of the China National Space Administration, said the satellite program, part of the country's ambitious three-stage lunar project, would be followed by the landing of an unmanned vehicle on the moon by 2010 and the collecting of samples of lunar soil with an unmanned vehicle by 2020. The last two stages are still under review by scientists before

official approval.

The satellite is intended to obtain three-dimensional images of the lunar surface and analyze the content of useful elements and materials, said Sun.

On December 31, 2003, he told Xinhua News that China would use its mature space technology and facilities in the first phase, using a Long March III A carrier rocket to launch the satellite.

He described the satellite project as an important step toward China's exploration of deeper space, and said the moon would provide a good platform from which to explore.

The lunar program is also known as the Chang'e Program, referring to a goddess who goes to the moon in an ancient Chinese fairy tale.

S & P Cautious on Currency, Optimistic on Economy

By Zhao Hongyi

Though it repeatedly expresses confidence in China's financial strength, Standard and Poor's gave the country's foreign currency reserve capability a 'BBB+' in its latest rating, which means 'adequate capacity to meet financial commitments, but more subject to adverse economic conditions'.

"The outlook is positive," said Paul Coughlin, managing director of S & P's corporate and government ratings, Asia Pacific, in Beijing Wednesday.

Coughlin was referring to the central government's determination to pursue reforms in the financial industry, the competition brought to the banking system by opening up under WTO commitments, and the overall taxation income increase, which, it believes, will "strengthen the central government's capability to provide adequate welfare."

"This in turn, will enhance

prospects for the market-oriented reform and down-sizing of the state owned economy," said Coughlin.

S & P also warned of the high level of consolidated government debt and more liabilities to the central government, saying, "If the government continues to assume the bad debts from the financial system, the cost of recapitalizing the system will increase dramatically."

The most challenging task ahead, according to S & P, is setting up a full range of financial institutions that can guarantee the sustainable growth of the economy.

S & P also predicts in its report that China's economy will increase at an annual rate of 7 percent in the years to come, due to the government's stable and predictable policies, falling trade barriers and the liberalizing of rules on foreign investment.

Import Car Quota to be Cancelled in 2005

By Yu Shanshan

From January 1, 2005, China will cancel its auto import quota, which this year stands at US \$14.49 billion, vice minister of commerce Wei Jianguo said in Guilin last Friday.

In line with commitments China made on its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), protection of the domestic car industry should end by 2005, and China's tariff rate for imported cars should drop to 25 percent by July 1, 2006, said Wei.

Since China's WTO accession in late 2001, China has been lowering its car import tariff rate significantly, he noted, and managing its import quota

in an orderly and transparent manner.

In 2003, China imported cars and related products worth US \$14.45 billion, up 84 percent year on year, customs figures showed. China has become the fourth largest auto manufacturing country in the world after the US, Japan and Germany.

Meanwhile since early 2004, prices of import cars have been falling. Hua Xue, executive director of Cheshi.com.cn, an online car sales company, noted that the cancellation of import car quotas will lead to remarkable changes in China's import car market. She said she expected prices of imported cars would fall by over 10 percent.

Equity Exchanges Merged

By Yu Shanshan

The Beijing government has established a "super" equity exchange by merging the Beijing Equity Exchange Center and Zhonguancun Technology and Equity Exchange.

Prior to the merger, which took effect last Saturday, the Beijing Exchange engaged in transfer of state-owned assets and the Zhonguancun Exchange technology equity transfer.

The Beijing State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission received approval for the merger plan on January 16. The speed with which it has been accomplished is seen as a sign that Beijing is competing with Tianjin to become the leading equity exchange center in north China.

"Our goal is to make the Beijing Equity Exchange the lead equity exchange in China," Yang Xin, vice president of Zhonguancun Technology and Equity Exchange, told *Beijing News* last Friday. Beijing Equity Exchange will also serve for enterprises directly under the central gov-

ernment and firms in neighboring regions.

"So far, 130 of the 180 state-owned enterprises directly under the State Council are registered in Beijing, and state-owned assets run by the Beijing municipal government are worth close to 400 billion yuan. Last year, the two equity exchange institutions achieved near 120 billion yuan in exchanges - that privilege will guarantee the realization of our goal," added Yang. He also said he expected that in the coming three to five years, Beijing's equity exchange quota would rise to 200 to 300 billion yuan.

At the opening ceremony for the new center, President Xiong Yanming said that aside from keeping its advantage in state-owned assets exchange and characteristics of providing high-tech enterprises with professional service in financing and investment, the Beijing Equity Exchange would focus on exploring effective ways to transfer stock of non-listed companies and building the market.

China Keen to Spur New WTO Talks

By Zhang Ran

A senior Chinese trade official said in Beijing last Thursday that China is willing to play a more active and constructive role in pushing forward a new round of World Trade Organization (WTO) talks.

Vice minister of commerce Yu Guangzhou told visiting US trade representative Robert Zoellick that China will consult with all members of the WTO, including the United States, to stimulate the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) talks.

The DDA, an international program aiming at reducing trade barriers so as to expand global economic growth, development and opportunity, faltered when the WTO ministers' meeting in Cancun, Mexico last September ended without result.

"China appreciates the US' efforts and pro-active suggestions in some sectors for resuming the talks," Yu said during his

meeting with Zoellick Thursday. The trade officials discussed agricultural issues and treatment of new WTO members in their one-hour talk. Yu also expressed China's concerns over further opening of its markets.

"As a new member of the WTO, China promised a lot to the organization. We opened and are continuing to open our markets in accordance with those pledges. It's very tough for us to open on a larger scale in the short term before the existing commitments are all implemented," Yu noted.

China and the United States, two of the world's major economies, have a number of common interests in agriculture, manufacturing goods and services, the US trade representative said. The two countries agreed to have more dialogue and the representatives are looking forward to working together with other countries, he said.

Red Bull Survives in China through Loose Standards

By Shan Jinliang

The European Union Court's decided to ban sales of Red Bull in France on February 5, but the beverage has maintained strong sales in the China market thanks to the lack of standards for such "energy drinks" in this country.

The EU approved a request filed by France to prevent sales of Red Bull, made in Austria, in French drugstores due to potential danger of caffeine overload. Five days later, Thailand-based Red Bull China issued an announcement affirming the safety of its products.

Both Red Bull Austria and Red Bull China claim one can of Red Bull contains the same amount of caffeine as one cup of brewed coffee. Yet all cans bear warnings that the beverage should not be consumed by children or pregnant women, as it can cause heart damage. In 2001, France, Japan, Denmark and Norway issued regulations restricting sales of Red Bull to drugstores only.

Chinese authorities have set a maximum caffeine content for soft drinks at 150 parts



per million, while the figure for tea drinks is 40 parts per million. When Red Bull debuted in the China market in 1997, the Ministry of Health granted it status as a special-purpose drink, as the concept of "energy drinks" had yet to come to the country.

A representative of the Health and Supervision Center under the Ministry of Health told the *21st Century Business Tribune* on Monday that there still are no concrete standards for special-purpose drinks in China.

Red Bull China spokesperson Zhang Lei said that all Red Bull products sold in China are produced in Beijing and Hainan using ingredients especially tailored to domestic consumers. He told *Beijing Today* that no cases of harm caused by overuse of Red Bull products had been reported in China.

Over-consumption of Red Bull mixed with vodka was suspected of causing the sudden deaths of three young Swedish men in 2001. The incident had minimal impact on sales in China.

Alibaba Bags \$82 Million in Foreign Investment

By Xiao Shan

A new record was set in China's booming IT industry with Tuesday's announcement that powerful domestic e-commerce website Alibaba.com had received \$82 million in overseas investment.

Established in 1999, Alibaba is the largest e-commerce company in China and one of the world's biggest business-to-business e-commerce sites. The new investment figure put it leagues ahead former foreign capital record holder Shanghai-based Shanda Networking Corporation, which bagged \$40 million last month.

Three of the four investors, Softbank Corporation, Fidelity Investment and Ventures TDF Technology Group, are already shareholders in Alibaba. The only new face is the American company Granite Global Ventures.

Alibaba has refused to release detailed information on the division of shares, but representatives have said company management and employees remain the majority shareholders. An article in the Beijing Times

reported that Softbank provided \$60 million of the funds and named Alibaba founder and CEO Jack Ma as the company's single largest shareholder.

The e-commerce business is headquartered in Hong Kong while its operational base is located in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. It operates three interlinked websites, the English-language www.alibaba.com for international users, the Chinese-language www.china.alibaba.com, and the Japanese-language japan.alibaba.com.

Last July, Alibaba invested \$12 million to establish the customer-to-customer sales site Taobao.com, which has quickly closed in on domestic industry leader EachNet.com.

Ma told the press on Tuesday that the \$80 million would be enough to cover the company's operations over the near future, but also indicated that Alibaba would spend heavily in order to fortify its position in China in preparation for new challenges from foreign e-commerce powers Ebay, Yahoo and Amazon.

IT Veteran Reaps \$13 Million in Overseas Capital

By Shan Jinliang

Wang Zhidong, one of the founders of China's top portal website, Sina.com, succeeded in securing \$13 million of foreign investment for his own company, Beijing Dianji Technology Corp. on Wednesday.

The investment, made by Fidelity Fund International, is the largest single flow of funds ever to go to the domestic software industry. Benson Tam, an international partner of Fidelity, said at a separate press conference held a few days before the an-

nouncement was made that foreign capital invested in China's IT industry mostly goes towards websites and online gaming operators, but in this case a software company was chosen because of the growing potential of the domestic market.

International market intelligence firm IDC has predicted China's software market to post an average annual growth rate of 25.8 percent for the period of 2002 to 2007, at which point market volume should reach over \$6.2 billion.

Amazon Searching for Golden Opportunities

By Jack Dan

Delegates from Amazon.com, the world largest e-commerce website, made their first visit to China from Sunday to Tuesday, searching for opportunities in this country's rapidly-growing online sales sector.

The team of five senior Amazon executives paid visits to do-

mestic companies Kingsoft and Lenovo, the two investors in China's top business-to-customer e-commerce website, Joyo.com. Leaders of Amazon and Joyo held private talks on Tuesday and some domestic media analysts have predicted Amazon may make strategic investments in e-commerce in China.

OK on Way for Direct Sales



This Amway outlet in Shanghai represents the "store-plus-plant" model forced on all direct sales companies in China in 1998. Photos by Photocom

By Shan Jinliang

Foreign direct-sales companies, such as Amway and Avon, are likely to gain formal footing this year in China following an announcement issued by the Ministry of Commerce last Monday that relevant legislation is in the works.

Deng Zhan, deputy director of the Ministry's Foreign Investment Department, made the surprise announcement during the visit of Hou Liwei, global vice president of US-based Amway Corporation to Beijing on February 9. Two days later, Huang Hai, assistant minister of commerce confirmed to the press that the government was accelerating efforts to draft a law on direct sales.

Deng said the government would distinguish direct sales from illegal pyramid sales schemes, encourage legal direct sales methods and promote the development of domestic and foreign-funded direct-sales companies in China.

According to an article in the Guangdong-based *21st Century Business Herald* on Monday, drafting of a temporary regulation on the establishment of foreign direct-sales companies has been completed. Deng said that foreign companies could push the development of domestic counterparts by providing valuable experience.

Last week, Hou held press conferences in Beijing and Shanghai at which he praised the move to clarify China's laws on direct sales. At the same time, he warned Chinese lawmakers not to include clauses requiring foreign direct-sales companies to open manufacturing plants in this country, as such demands would violate basic rules of the World Trade Organization.

At both press conferences, Hou said Amway

had no plans to give up its production base next to the company's China headquarters in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province. Amway announced in June last year that it would invest another 120 million yuan in Guangzhou, a figure equivalent to its total investment over the previous 10 years. Not coincidentally, China became Amway's largest single market worldwide later in 2003.

Chen Zhixin, general manager for sales, operation and manufacturing for Avon China told Shanghai-based *Youth Daily*, "Since China is such a big market, Avon can still do pretty well from wholesale and retail schemes. Of course, the green light for direct sales would allow Avon to do much better."

News of the impending laws is not as exciting for Chinese direct-sales companies like Tianjin-based Tianshi Group, as the market could become dominated by foreign companies as a result of preferential policies.

Feng Lei, a research fellow from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences told the *21st Century Business Herald* that harm inflicted by illegal sales schemes made the passing of related law an economic necessity.

Following the introduction of the direct sales concept to China in 1992, some domestic companies ran illegal pyramid sales scams under the cover of direct sales, asking new salespeople to pay fees for that privilege while not producing promised goods.

In April 1998, the State Council banned the operation of all direct-sales schemes. Two months later, the State Council issued a new rule requiring such companies to shift to a "store plus plant" business model.

China Netcom Buys Asia Netcom

By Shan Jinliang

China Netcom announced last Friday that it had wholly purchased Asia Netcom as an important step in the preparations for its initial public offerings in Hong Kong and the US this year.

Asia Netcom was established in March 2003 by China Netcom and Newbridge Capital, Softbank Asia Infrastructure Fund and based on Asia Global Crossing. Before the change, Asia Global Crossing was one of the region's largest undersea cable network operators, connecting Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and other countries and regions.

The company went bankrupt in 2002 and was picked up and reshaped by majority shareholder China Netcom (Hong Kong) and the two foreign firms with a total investment of \$80 million.

According to Beijing-based *Communications World* magazine, Newbridge Capital and Softbank Asia Infrastructure Fund agreed to withdraw their capital from Asia Netcom in order to support China Netcom's IPO preparations.

Newbridge Asia Managing Director Lee Daniels was quoted in that report as saying his company would maintain its partnership with China Netcom, adding that because Newbridge was well compensated for its share of Asia Netcom that it worked out as a fair deal for both sides.

First JV Housing Savings Bank Opens

Sino-German Bausparkasse, the first-ever Sino-foreign joint venture housing savings bank, was inaugurated Sunday in Tianjin. Its main business is the extension of home loans to Chinese customers.

The joint venture was established by the China Construction Bank (CCB), one of the country's "big four" state-owned banks, and the Bausparkasse Schwaebische Hall, the largest home savings bank in Germany.

Customers that make deposits in Sino-German Bausparkasse are entitled to obtain home loans with an annual interest rate of 3.3 percent, far below that of other home loans offered in China.

The new bank will create a channel of money collection for common house buyers on the back of the German side's rich experience, advanced technology and service ideas and CCB's market reputation, market, manpower and network resources, noted Zhang Enzhao, CCB president and board chairman of Sino-German Bausparkasse.

Interest rates will be fixed through contracts between the bank and its clients and will not be affected by rate fluctuations in the capital market. (Xinhua)

GE Provides Support for 2008 Olympics

By Sun Ming

General Electric, a sponsor of all the Olympic Games to be held between 2005 and 2012, displayed a range of its high-tech products at the Stadia China 2004 exhibition held in the China World Trade Center from Monday to Wednesday.

Among the products shown were GE's EntryScan walk-through detector, water treatment equipment that turns sewage into water suitable for landscape use, Traveling Power Plant, a mobile power solution, and Lexan, resin that can replace glass in stadium construction.

Steve Schneider, GE corporate vice president and chairman and CEO of GE China, said at a press conference held prior to the opening of the exhibition on Monday that his company had formed a cross-business Olympics Team in China.

"The team will do its best to contribute to stadium and infrastructure construction, transportation and environmental improvement projects for Beijing," he said.

South Korea Passes Risky Pact

Seoul, February 16 (Reuters) - South Korea's parliament braved the wrath of a powerful farm lobby on Monday to pass a free trade agreement with Chile, the Asian trading powerhouse's first bilateral market-opening deal.

The South Korea-Chile free trade agreement (FTA) was signed a year ago, but violent demonstrations by farmers and obstruction by farm-belt legislators foiled three previous attempts by the National Assembly to vote on the trade bill.

With nervous lawmakers eyeing an April 15 general election, the Chile FTA passed the vote in Seoul with 162 for, 71 against and one abstention. A total of 234 lawmakers in the 273-seat assembly cast votes.

South Korea's commerce ministry hailed the vote and said it would increase exports to Chile of cars, mobile phones and other key industrial goods by \$220 million a

year in the medium term.

Manufacturers have given higher figures for South Korea's export gains and voiced hopes that Chile will serve as a beachhead in the rapidly integrating North-South American market.

"The liberalization of trade is an inescapable trend, and our government will make active efforts on FTAs with Singapore, Japan and other countries," the ministry said in a statement.

Until Monday, South Korea had been one of the few members of the World Trade Organization not to have signed an FTA. Countries across the globe have been scrambling to seal one-on-one deals since WTO talks to tear down trade barriers became bogged down.

Analyst's Take:

The South Korea-Chile free trade agreement will not only bring

these two countries great economic gains but also pave the road for South Korea to sign FTAs with more economic giants. By passing the FTA, South Korea proves to the whole world it is opening up its markets.

It may be that South Korea chooses Chile as its first FTA because the influence of this particular agreement will be comparatively small. Also Chile can serve as a beach head in the Latin American market, and can provide lots of negotiation experience for South Korea.

Passing an FTA with Chile will not only redeem South Korea's international image, which has been tarnished by the prolonged FTA negotiations, but also open the door of Chile's market to its key industries: automobiles and mobile phones.

- Chen Jin, Institute of Asia and Pacific Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Farmers Vow Political Revenge

The head of a major farm group said he and his followers would make politicians pay at the polls in April.

"This will kill the farmers, the farms and this country's agriculture," said Seo Jung-eui, chairman of the Korean Advanced Farmers Federation.

"We will work to make sure that those who voted for the agreement will lose their seats in the election," said Seo, one of about 3,000 farmers police estimated had staged a rally outside the parliament complex in Seoul.

Last year, Seoul proposed a 10-year, 119 trillion won (\$100 billion) farm package to mollify farmers, who make up about 12 percent of South Korea's population and flex political muscle far in excess of their tiny contribution to gross domestic product.

Sensitive products like meat and rice were excluded from the pact with Chile. But South Korea farmers fear cheap Chilean fruit and believe any opening of the country's highly protected agricultural markets will eventually put them out of business.

Trouble in Toy Town

New York, February 16 (Reuters) - Retail toy buyers large and small flocked to the American International Toy Fair hoping to snap up hot products for 2004, and stem the sector's slumping fortunes.

The toy industry wasn't very playful in 2003, stymied by bankruptcies and cutthroat price wars. Manufacturers are struggling to find a way to keep their brand names valuable, while still doing business with the retail behemoths.

Foot traffic was steady at the Jacob Javits Convention Center, as buyers tossed balls, poked plush animals, squeezed crib toys and tried their luck at board games, looking for something to make their inventory stand out.

AFP Photo



US Trade Deficit Hits New Record

Washington, February 13 (AP) - America's trade deficit ballooned to an all-time high in 2003, reflecting the hearty US appetite for foreign-made cars, clothing and TVs.

The total deficit was \$489.4 billion, 17.1 percent larger than the previous record, set in 2002, the Commerce Department reported Friday. The deficit with China alone was close to \$124 billion, also a record.

The value of foreign goods and services sold to the United States swelled to a record \$1.5 trillion for the year, an 8.3 percent increase, as the economy gained momentum in the second half of the year. Consumers and businesses spent briskly, reflecting increased confidence that the recovery would last.

Imports of automobiles and car parts came to \$210.1 billion in 2003, a record high. Sales to the US market of foreign-made consumer goods - a category that includes clothing, television sets, furniture and jewelry - also came to a record high of \$333.8 billion last year.

"That appetite is a reflection that the US economy is much stronger than the rest of the world," said Oscar Gonzalez, economist at John Hancock. "We are the engine of demand."

US exporters, however, also saw gains last year. Exports totaled \$1 trillion - the best showing since 2000 - and a 4.6 percent increase from 2002.

The increase in exports was helped by a weaker US dollar, which makes US goods less expensive and thus more competitive in world markets, and improving economic times abroad.

Exports of consumer goods, including gems, household appliances and cosmetics, came to \$89.9 billion in 2003, an all-time high. Sales of US industrial

supplies to other countries in 2003 totaled \$172.9 billion, also a record high. Exports of foods, feeds and beverages totaled \$55.1 billion, the highest level since 1996.

Media Report:

The focus of the international financial market is still on the US economy this week. On February 11, Alan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve, pointed out in his speech to Congress that he was not considering increasing interest rates at this time though the US economy had gained a powerful increase. He also said there were three major barriers to US economic recovery: underemployment, the financial deficit and the trade deficit.

1. Underemployment hindering economic recovery

Underemployment remains a major obstacle to the recovery of the US economy. Though the economy was able to grow last year due to improved production efficiency, the low increase in employment opportunities really surprised Greenspan.

2. Huge financial deficit creates short-term risks

The Bush administration estimates that this year's financial deficit will come to \$521 billion. Greenspan has warned that the nation's record-high deficit would bring potential risks to the recovery of the economy in the short term.

3. Depreciation of US dollar unable to cut trade deficit

With the US trade deficit hitting a record high of \$489.4 billion in 2003, the influence of the depreciation of the US dollar in the past two years on correcting the massive trade imbalance has been regarded as very insignificant.

Xinhua News

AT&T Bought for 41 Billion



Atlanta, United States, February 17 (AFP) - Cingular Wireless won a bidding war for AT&T Wireless with a staggering US\$41 billion offer, a deal which would make it America's top mobile service provider.

The final bid - the highest all-cash bid ever made in the United States, according to AT&T Wireless spokesman David Caouette - left investors and credit assessors worried.

The price was too rich for the only other bidder, British giant Vodafone, already suffering on London's stock exchange as investors sweated over reports it had offered 38 billion dollars.

"It's a very full price for a business with falling subscriber numbers and profits," said Julian Hewett, telecommunications analyst for the European consultancy firm Ovum.

"If Vodafone's game was to drive up the price, then it's certainly succeeded."

Major credit rating agencies New York-based Moody's Investors Service and Standard and Poor's warned they may downgrade Cingular Wireless and its parents because of an expected increase in debt to pay for the deal.

Cingular's parents are SBC Communications, which owns 60 percent, and BellSouth Corp., which owns 40 percent. SBC shares fell 21 cents or 0.84 percent to \$24.66 and BellSouth dropped 49 cents or

1.66 percent to \$29.06.

Vodafone shareholders, meanwhile, heaved a sigh of relief that they were out of the race, sending the British giant's shares up 6.2 percent to 140.75 pence in London.

Cingular, now the number-three US wireless carrier, aimed to complete the deal at the end of 2004 providing it leaps regulatory hurdles and wins shareholders' approval.

Together, Cingular and AT&T Wireless, currently the number two provider, would create an entity with 46 million customers and sales of more than 32 billion dollars, based on the firms' 2003 performance.

That would eclipse current US leader Verizon Wireless, which has about 36 million customers.

Cingular president and chief executive Stan Sigman said the companies could find synergies worth one billion dollars in 2006 and then two billion dollars annually from 2007.

He said he was "very comfortable" that savings through synergies between the two companies would cover the huge premium in the price.

Some of the synergies would be found by eliminating jobs.

"Yes, there will be employees that are affected by this," Sigman told a telephone news conference.

The number of workers affected was not yet known, he said.

AT&T Wireless chairman and chief executive John Zeglis said he would depart his post once the deal was wrapped up, leaving Sigman as the chief executive.

"We do not need two CEOs; that is a key synergy here. One desk, one salary, one CEO," he said. "I will only stay for whatever transition help that Stan (Sigman) might need me for."

Japan Signs Deal with Iran

Tokyo, February 18 (FT.com) - Japan has signed a landmark agreement with Iran to develop one of the world's largest oilfields in a move that could rekindle tensions with the US.

Kazumasa Kusaka, Japanese energy minister, signed the basic agreement in Iran on Wednesday. It gives Japan the right to develop the controversial Azadegan oilfield for an estimated \$2.8bn.

Tokyo's decision to press ahead with the Azadegan contract highlights its need to seek new energy sources.

It will be the largest oilfield development yet for Japan, which has few natural energy sources of its own.

United Airlines Kicks Off

Ad Campaign

Chicago, February 18 (AP) - A more image-conscious United Airlines, seeking to fill more seats with business travelers as it prepares to exit bankruptcy, began displaying a new color scheme on its planes Wednesday and kicked off its first new advertising campaign in four years.

The moves come a week after United launched its discount carrier named Ted, which also was aimed at grabbing attention with a new image and flashier colors than United's traditional and understated blue-and-gray scheme.

The nation's No. 2 airline unveiled two planes in San Francisco on Wednesday with the new look: a dark blue belly, a bright white top and a large "United" emblazoned on the front sides of the plane.

Honda Seeks US Plane

Engine Plant

Tokyo, February 18 (AFP) - Japan's third-largest carmaker Honda is in final talks with a US aircraft engine maker to set up a 50-50 joint venture in the US to produce propeller engines for small planes, a report said.

Honda and Teledyne Continental Motors Inc. aim to establish the joint venture as early as spring, the business daily Nihon Keizai Shimbun said. The amount of capitalization was not mentioned in the daily.

The United States is the world's biggest market for small airplanes with annual sales of small aircraft engines estimated at 20-30 billion yen (US\$190-280 million).

Disney Rejects New Offer

Los Angeles, February 17 (AP) - The Walt Disney Company rejected Comcast Corp.'s takeover bid, but it also kept the cable giant's hopes alive by indicating more money might do the trick.

The board's unanimous rejection Monday came one week after Disney chief executive Michael Eisner rebuffed an offer for talks that came from Comcast chairman Brian Roberts in a brief phone call.

Comcast responded Monday and said the offer still stands.

In a statement, the Disney board clearly showed it was keeping all options open.



Supporters of former Yukos oil chief and Kremlin opposer Mikhail Khodorkovsky hold his picture behind the fence of Moscow's court house.

AFP Photo

Yukos Chief Still Kicking Heels

Moscow, February 18 (AP) - The jailed ex-chief of Russia's Yukos oil company doesn't want his partners to surrender their shares in the oil giant in exchange for his freedom, an aide said Wednesday.

Khodorkovsky, who resigned as Yukos chief shortly after his October 25 arrest on fraud and tax evasion charges, has remained in custody awaiting trial. Courts have repeatedly dismissed petitions by Khodorkovsky's lawyers to free him on bail.

On Tuesday, one of the co-owners of the holding company that controls Yukos suggested that the main shareholders would be willing to relinquish their stock to the Russian government in exchange for Khodorkovsky's freedom.

Fire at Jilin Mall Claims 53 Lives

By Dong Nan

A fire that swept through a shopping center in Jilin City, Jilin Province around noon on Sunday killed 53 people and left another 71 injured.

The blaze broke out at 11 am in a temporary store near the boiler room on the second floor of the 4,000 square meter, four-story Zhongbai Commercial Plaza.

By 1:45 pm rescue personnel had brought the fire under control and it was completely extinguished at 3:30 pm. More than 120 managed to escape the burning building, including 71 who sustained burns or injury from jumping out the buildings' windows. As of Wednesday, the 14 most seriously injured people were out of critical condition.

"I saw smoke everywhere as I came out of the bathroom on the third floor. The corridors were dark and we could not find a way out," Jin Qiuyue, 47, who sustained serious injury in the incident, told Xinhua. "Some other people and I tied some bed sheets we grabbed from the bathhouse together to form a rope and used it to climb down out of a window. But it wasn't long enough and I fell."

Jin broke her right foot and injured her back in the fall.

Fireman Zhao Xudong told Xin-



Firefighters completely extinguished the fire four hours after it broke out on the commercial plaza's second floor.

Photo by Photocom

hua, "We received the call at 11:33 in the morning. When we arrived, we saw many people jumping out of windows on the fourth floor. Some died instantly when they fell, others were wounded."

"The fire started dying down at 1:30 in the afternoon and we rushed in to rescue any survivors. When we got to the

fourth floor, we were shocked to find it was full of bodies. We figured that they went up to the fourth floor because the windows on the bottom three levels were blocked by bars. The bodies were all blackened by the smoke and their faces had expressions of terrible pain."

Jilin police quickly rounded up more

than 30 people, including the owner of the plaza and the owner of the store in which the blaze started, for questioning. On Thursday, the police released their conclusion that a burning cigarette butt discarded in the small store sparked the fire. The police have taken a person suspected of starting the blaze into custody, but have not revealed the suspect's identity.

Fire safety expert Yang Zhijie and others investigating the case have also pointed the finger at the plaza's management for not observing standard fire safety practices. Yang told Xinhua that while the plaza did have fire extinguishers and other fire fighting equipment, employees did not use any of the devices in the incident.

Many survivors also told the police that there were no clear evacuation directions in the plaza. Moreover, one side entrance with easy stair access to the top floor was closed and the space rented out to two shops. Two emergency exits had been similarly shut and their areas rented.

On Tuesday, Jilin Governor Hong Hu issued a public apology for the tragedy and promised the government would do everything possible to help victims and their families.

Heat Turned Up on Fake Firearms

By Jiang Yongzhu

Toy guns and other replica firearms have disappeared from stalls in the Shiji Tianding Wholesale Market in Chongwen District and other local shopping centers following a police crackdown that led to the arrest of one toy vendor on February 14.

The offending retailer, a young woman of 17 surnamed Dong, was charged with the illegal sale of imitation guns capable of firing hard plastic or steel projectiles. The law clearly stipulates that toy firearms can only shoot harmless bullets.

When police checked the market that day, they found 109 different kinds of imitation guns at Dong's stall, many of which looked very real, a few models even equipped with laser sights.

Xuanwu District police first caught wind of Dong's violation after watching three sellers of fake guns in the Qianmen area purchase guns from her.

Officer Zhang from the Nuijie police station explained that toy guns difficult to distinguish from the real items violate China's Regulation on Gun Management. He added that there have been many cases of robbery in which criminals have held victims at fake-gun point. "These kinds of mock guns are very dangerous for kids to play with," Zhang said, noting that such weapons can cause serious injury within a range of 30 meters.

The campaign to get these fake weapons off store shelves and streets is not isolated to Beijing. Lin Xiaofeng, a doctor at the Zhongshan Ophthalmologic Hospi-



Fake guns difficult to distinguish from original items are banned by Chinese law.

tal in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, told a reporter from news website Dayang that since the end of Spring Festival, he had treated dozens of teenage patients who suffered eye injuries caused by such toy guns. A few of the unfortunate young people have lost sight permanently.

A tour of the over 50 toy stands at the Tianding Market near Zhushikou turned up nary a trace of these fake weapons. "Who would dare sell copy guns any more? We now know they are illegal," said one vendor, under condition of anonymity. Checks of the Tianyi Market east of Ganjiakou in Xicheng District had similar results - no fake guns.

Chen Xi from the Tianding Wholesale Market's marketing department told *Beijing Today* that the market's management had set strict new regulations preventing the sale of illegal imitation weapons, adding that market supervisors would be carefully checking the legality of all goods on sale.

Man Killed Crossing Highway

By Wang Xiaoxiao

The Beijing-Kaifeng expressway was the scene of a terrible accident late last Friday night in which one man was killed and his body completely destroyed.

The man was one of three people that got out of a long distance bus bound from Henan Province that suddenly stopped in the middle of the expressway at around 5:20 that morning. Trying to cross four lanes of oncoming traffic to reach the side of the highway, he was struck and knocked down by a car, then crushed by a large truck carrying tons of sand. The driver of the truck had no way of seeing

the victim as he lay on the pavement and did not even have time to hit the brakes before the terrible impact.

By the time police arrived at the scene, the man's body had been passed over by many more cars and damaged beyond recognition.

According to the Fengtai traffic management department, long distance buses are strictly forbidden from taking or leaving passengers on highways. The office also identified the deceased as surnamed Hou, a resident of Mengzhuang Village in Dancheng County, Henan. The incident is under investigation.



Photo by Lu Beifeng

Chen Lihua (left), owner of the China Red Sandalwood Museum, has had reason to celebrate of late. The National Tourism Administration granted a title of AAAA, or first-class, travel site to the facility on January 13, making it the first privately-owned museum ever so honored.

The unusual museum, located at 9 Xinglong Xijie in the Gaobeidian area of Chaoyang District, houses a collection of more than 1,000 pieces of antique furniture made from rare and beautiful red sandalwood.



Photo by Photocom

Panda Gets Grand Greeting

By Zhang Ran

Giant panda Hua Mei became the first of her species born overseas to return to China when her plane touched down at Beijing Capital International Airport on Thursday.

Before leaving the airport, she underwent initial quarantine and physical checks and was determined to be in good health.

Hua Mei returned to her ancestral home in keeping with the rules of China's panda loaning program, which requires cubs of panda pairs born abroad to be repatriated within three years.

The four-year-old panda, whose name means "China-America" in Mandarin, will be held in quarantine for one month at her new home, the Wolong Panda Protection Center in Sichuan Province. Afterwards, she will join the

center's population of around 50 pandas, including her father, Shi Shi, who returned to China last January. Hua Mei was slated to follow shortly after him, but the SARS outbreak delayed the move, according to a Xinhua New Agency report from February 12.

She has recently entered prime breeding age, and her keepers in Wolong hope to find her a mate and get her reproducing, a notoriously difficult task among pandas born in captivity. Pandas only enter heat for a few days each year and can be highly selective about their partners.

Scientists believe there are only around 1,000 pandas left in the wild. Worldwide, there are 150 of the bears living in captivity, less than 20 of which are in zoos or other facilities outside China.

Customs Cuts Storage Fees for Foreigners

By Chen Si

Permanent foreign residents and foreign students living in Beijing can look forward to paying far less for shipping in articles to their new homes this year, according to a story in *Beijing Daily* on February 14. More than 10 people have already taken advantage of the charge changes.

In the past, Beijing Customs often held personal items, such as furniture, shipped in by permanent foreign residents as they concluded the examination and confirmation of their certificates of identity, and then charged very high prices for the service.

According to the new regulation, agent companies can ship their customers' goods from Tanggu, a major port next to Tianjin, to the Non-trade Articles Supervision Center of Beijing Customs by merely providing photo-copies of clients' passports. The goods will then be held at the center during examination and approval procedures, but at far lower cost than under the previous system. Even if goods are held at the supervision center for a few months for some special reason, the final price should not come to more than a couple hundred yuan.

A Beijing Customs clerk surnamed Shan told *Beijing Today* that it used to take some foreign officials and corporate representatives 20 days to a few months to pass the examination process, and port holding fees were set to double every ten days. That meant that an extended period of storage could cost upwards of 20,000 yuan.

Parking Policy to Push Public Transportation

By Wang Xiaoxiao

In the near future, Beijing residents who live outside the Fourth Ring Road will be able to park their cars at minimal cost, or even for free, at huge parking lots offering convenient access to subway and bus stops. The lots will be guarded and mostly set up along the fourth and the new fifth ring roads and are intended to encourage use of public transport in order to relieve traffic congestion downtown.

According to the Beijing Municipal Communication Commission, the local government is planning to change the layout of the downtown transportation structure and public transportation systems to improve the deteriorating traffic situation in the capital.

The commission is considering building a first parking lot at Sihui, where the Fourth Ring Road intersects Jianguomen Avenue in eastern Beijing.

The campaign is aimed at not only getting cars off the road, but at showing commuters that public transportation can be cheaper, easier and more convenient than driving.

Elegy for Vanishing Alleys

By Ju Ming

Researchers under the Xicheng District government are working on a comprehensive history of the capital's hutongs, or historic alleyways, before many disappear forever. The office issued a press release on Monday stating information collection was complete and compilation was set to begin. The final result will be published and available for public access and purchase.

Hutongs are evocative symbols of old Beijing, as crucial to the fabric of the city's past as *siheyuan*, or courtyard homes. Construction of hutongs began when Beijing was made the capital of China under the Yuan Dynasty. Over the past few decades, however, rapid construction and modernization in this city has led to the wholesale destruction of these alleys and the old, single-story buildings that used to line them.

According to the office, in Xicheng District alone, nearly 200 hutongs have disappeared in the past 50 years, cutting the number of alleys to just over 600 by the end of 2003.

The office began collecting necessary information last September and conducted in-depth investigations of every remaining hutong and street in Xicheng. Not only were these alleys' locations and dimensions noted, but their particularly histories, the origins of their names and stories from their pasts were also recorded.



Lee Wen

Does The Lady Complain Too Much?

By Wang Xiaoxiao

Writer Lee Wen, daughter of the famous Taiwan writer Lee Ao, has not been too impressed by her neighbors since coming to Beijing. She's been living in a fairly swanky villa community but has found herself surrounded by continual barking of dogs, loud music, roosters crowing and all sorts of other aggravations. Her continual complaints have made her somewhat unpopular in the community and now they want her to move out.

Lee Wen signed a three-year contract with Beijing Mengke Properties Company. Ltd and moved into the Gahood Villa in August last year. She has been upset by her neighbors ever since. The barking dogs make it hard for her to work and the roosters start crowing at 5 am every morning, making it hard for her to fall asleep again. She says the vegetables her neighbors plant have also attracted a lot of mosquitoes. She thought

her right to peace was being violated so she talked with her neighbors but failed to get any joy. The property management people were similarly unhelpful.

Unexpectedly, on February 10, the property management asked her to leave the community within one week, threatening to cut off the electricity and water if she didn't comply.

It turns out the property management staff were under pressure from five owners, who were angry that Lee Wen was always complaining and had brought a bad atmosphere to the neighborhood. The five owners asked the company to drive Lee Wen out, saying they would refuse to continue paying water and electricity bills otherwise.

So Lee Wen is taking to the courts and suing the company for breaking the contract. Does she have a right to peace and is she being hounded out of her own home, or should she just put up with the noise?

Opinions follow:

Lee Wen

I am sure most of us, expats who live in Beijing, especially in the "villa community", have all experienced frustrations regarding the lack of professional service from the property management and problems in our living environment.

Who likes to hear chickens crowing at 5 am, loud music, banned dogs barking 24 hours a day, neighbors hanging underwear out in the open and have cars speeding in a residential area?

I am an American born Chinese and I know all about the so called "bad traits" of my people. Many well known scholars, Lu Xun, Bao Yang and my father Lee Ao, have criticized the immoral and evil characteristics of the people in China for many years. All these problems are still rooted in the capital of China where moral issues are ignored.

Recently I was served with an eviction notice from Gahood Villa.

This mess all started with my new book *"Like Father, Like Daughter"* which revealed some of the dirty secrets of living in upscale properties in Beijing and peoples' uncivilized behavior. I have found a lawyer and plan to sue them for breach of contract and libel.

I hope the expat community or even the local Chinese citizens can stand up and fight for our rights. This is not an issue of differences between American and Chinese culture, or just another China moment. If our lives are disturbed, our rights as consumers are violated. We must support each other.

Lawrence Sterne once said: "Respect for ourselves guides our morals, respect for others guides our manners."

Chen Yuanyu, manager of Beijing Mengke Properties Company, Ltd.

Chen said in an interview with *Beijing Youth Daily* on February 12 that the reason they asked Lee Wen to leave is that she had had a bad influence on her neighbors and was too concerned about her own rights and interests. He said the company didn't really want to force her out but just let her know her own problem. "But if Lee Wen is willing to move, we would pay the penalty for breach of contract and other related expenses," added Manager Chen.

Jin Keke, doctor of Civil Law, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

According to the Civil Law, the right to peace is one part of privacy. So defending this right is supported by the law. But there isn't a detailed explanation on what the right to peace is, so in the law court a judge should make a judgment according to the normal standard. And the standard comes from our daily life. So deciding whether her standards are the same as other Chinese people is very important. I guess the problem just comes from the conflict between western and Chinese culture. But one thing is for sure, terminating the contract is not legal.

Dou Ningyu, a student at Renmin University

I support Lee Wen. There haven't been too many people to point out what bad habits we Chinese have. And Lee Wen, as a Chinese-American, tells us the things that are bad in foreigners' eyes because she hopes that Chinese can get rid of these habits. What is she doing wrong? Why can't we be modest enough to listen to her? Sometimes we can't discover the problems ourselves as we've become used to them for so long. Lee Wen can show us these problems.

Guo Hua, student, Osaka University, Japan

I guess there must be something wrong with Lee Wen. Does she have to be that picky? It's quite common for our neighbors to have an animal. And we can't stop these animals from making noise. But actually, I think animals are rarely so noisy that you can't fall asleep or work. We should learn to be lenient. In Japan, there are a lot of similar cases, but you don't see people quarrelling about it because they are tolerant.

Wu Nan, bartender, Cool Touch

I think the neighbors have their own fault as well. But perhaps there are some other ways to solve the problem instead of making the whole thing so unpleasant? The measures Lee Wen and the neighbors have taken are not appropriate.

Lee Wen was born in New York in 1964, daughter of the famous Taiwan writer Lee Ao. Her new book Like Father, Like daughter narrates her extraordinary life. In it she lists many of the bad habits she's found in Chinese people.



Watching Over You

By Zhang Ran

China Unicom launched a promotion activity for Valentine's Day that it thought was a really good idea. It was a new application called Care Star allowing users to check on the location of partners or family members via their mobile phones. Unfortunately, it soon ignited a debate about the intrusion of hi-tech communication systems into people's lives.

Part of the appeal, Unicom believes, is that the service will allow children carrying a mobile to be located by their parents anytime, anywhere. The process is quite simple: once the number of the phone the child is carrying is entered, you will then be told their exact position.

IT commentators saw the Care Star service as a strategy for China Unicom to enter the children's mobile market. But when *Beijing Star Daily* covered the launch of the service, they titled their report "Care Star to Spy on Children", raising the issue of trust. The service, however, is not limited to parents for the care of children. According to Gao Fei, who works for Xie Jin Company, service provider for China Unicom, about 200 people have already tried this new service. Among them, only 40% are parents. The rest are couples and aged people.

Does this new service amount to an invasion of privacy? Some people say it reminds them of Feng Xiaogang's movie *Cell Phone*, in which people, especially lovers, lose trust in each other due to the application of new communication techniques. Could the service be improperly used, to spy on people? Opinions follow:

Chen Huichang, professor of Child Psychology, Beijing Normal University

If the children are in 3rd, 4th or 5th grade, parents should already know where they are without having to check on it. And when the children are older and at middle school, parents should reduce their supervision anyway and give their children more freedom and privacy.

People usually go to two extremes. On the one hand, parents don't think about respecting their children's privacy and maintain a high level of control over their behavior. On the other hand, children think parents should not supervise them at all.

Care Star could help find a balance, helping reassure parents and giving children space. If properly used, it could have a positive effect.

Zhao Xiaofeng, programmer for an IT company

I am a CDMA user and have heard about the Care Star service, but I don't intend to use it, even if my girl friend asks me too. If she makes such a requirement, it will only show she does not trust me. My cell phone is on 24 hours a day, and my girlfriend can call me anytime. Besides, I think there should be privacy between lovers. You do not have to tell your partner everything. If we are on the edge of losing trust, then I do not believe technology can do any good.

Miss Gao, working for an advertising company

The key point is whether we have mutual trust. Even though the service can find your position, it can not overcome a lack of trust between two people. On the other side, if two people trust each other, then wherever they are, the distance will not be a problem. So this service seems unnecessary.

Mr Yu, working for a well known insurance company

I love my wife very much and we have had a good relationship. But recently we have not been getting on so well. I think Care Star can help, because I don't want to spy on my wife, I just want to know where she is. I also want her to know where I am. Then even if we don't see each other for the whole day, by knowing where she is, I can feel she is together with me.

I do not think it's a sign of distrust, just a new method of communication. If two people trust each other, then there is no need to worry about using it.

Gao Fei, working for Xie Jin Company

People who complain about the Care Star service do not really understand it. The search doesn't work unless people want it to. The movie *Cell Phone* exaggerates paranoia about this.

The service can have many uses. Besides children, there are senior citizens and other groups who need new technology like this so they can be taken care of. And if people want to spy, there are many more advanced ways of doing it than using a mobile phone.

Zhai Yibing, manager of valued-added services department, China Unicom

This kind of service is developing at a rapid speed in the US, Japan and Korea. U-map will bring convenience to people as well as bring a big profit to China telecom services. China Unicom will devote itself to developing of the service together with the terminal device producers and content providers.

SOUND BITES

"There seems to be a consensus emerging that elections are essential and everyone would want elections. But at the same time, there seems to be a general acceptance of the fact that it is not going to be possible to arrange an election between now and the end of June."

— UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in the interview with the Japanese newspaper *Yomiuri*, Thursday.

Insurgents killed two American soldiers Thursday in a roadside bombing west of Baghdad.

With casualties mounting in an election year, the Bush administration would like to transfer political power to the Iraqis by the end

of June and shift more security responsibility to the U.S.-trained Iraqi force.

"We the people of India ... would like peace and harmony to prevail in the world in the true spirit of Buddhism. We, therefore dedicate this temple to the world."

— Indian Tourism Minister Shri Jagmohan said at a gathering held at Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhi Gaya's religious center 19 February.

Monks chanted mantras as 400 worshippers from 25 countries gathered Thursday at Buddhism's most sacred shrine to celebrate its inclusion in UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites.

The temple was declared a UNESCO heritage site in June 2002, but it took several months to prepare before the formal dedication could be held Thursday with the lighting of lamps, beating of drums and reciting of Buddhist scriptures by monks in red and saffron robes.

"The bird epidemic is unfolding and continuing to spread at an unprecedented rate. We are in an emergency, urgency mode."

— Bjorn Melgaard, the WHO representative in Thailand, told regional health experts gathered in Bangkok to compare notes on fighting the virus.

The World Health Organization

said authorities were rushing to declare the disease ravaging their poultry flocks under control and it warned people were still at risk from the H5N1 virus that has killed 22 people in Asia.

"The prime minister also emphasized the road map is the only political plan acceptable to Israel."

— said a statement released by Israel Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who presented plans for possible unilateral steps in the West Bank and Gaza and told US envoys on Thursday that Israel had not abandoned a US-backed peace "road map."

By Dong Nan

Chinese students are experiencing a revolution in their ideas and knowledge of sex, according to a large-scale survey which was published at the end of last year. But though students are far more sexually aware than they were ten years ago, this is largely thanks to the Internet and sleazy publications than the formal education they're receiving. Some are calling for Chinese schools and colleges to start holding sex education classes, so that students aren't forced to look elsewhere for their information.

The survey involved more than five thousand college students from all around the country and was conducted by the Chinese Youth and Children Research Center between 2000 and 2002.

More open ideas

No one doubts that modern college students have more access to pornographic products these days, such as books, magazines, VCDs and Internet websites.

"When I was a college student at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, we never had access to any pornography," said Liang, a 60-year-old retired engineer. "We knew of some pornographic novels such as *Jinpingmei*, but no one had the opportunity to read them. And I think this situation lasted till the end of the 1970s."

But this is obviously not the case nowadays. According to the survey, more than 80% of participants had come across sex either on TV, pornographic movies or the Internet.

Another survey done by Pan Suiming, a sociologist at Renmin University in 1997 found that 93% of male college students and 70% of female students had read or watched pornography.

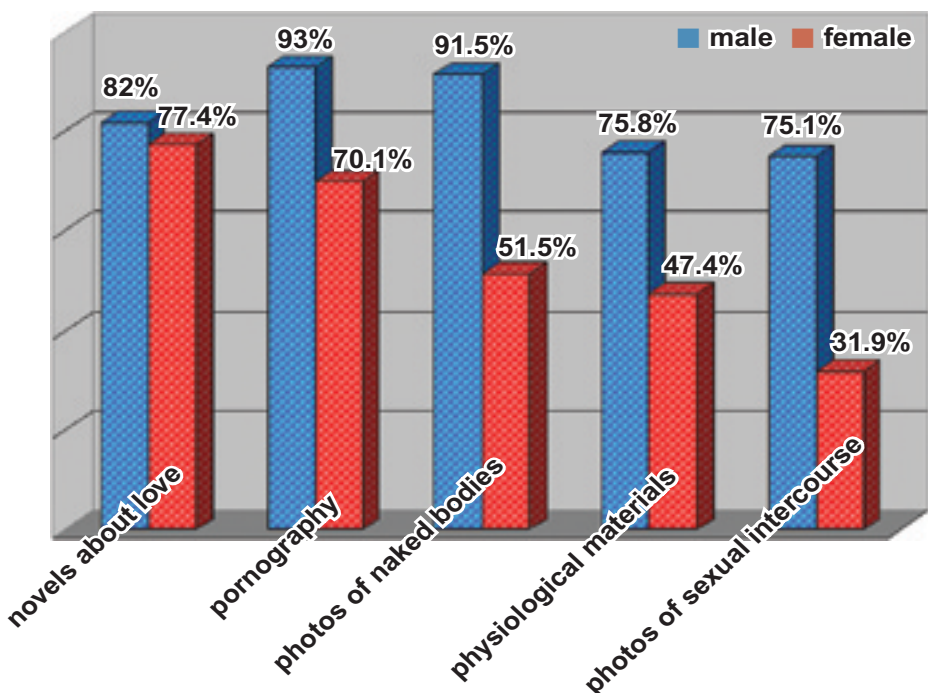
When asked about this growing trend towards sexual openness, only 8% were strongly in favour, saying there would be no negative effects; 11.4% said they thought it was a good thing; 13% were cautiously in favor, so long as people were careful; 17% of the participants said they strongly disapproved of the new sexual awakening. The rest couldn't make up their minds.

When asked their opinions about sexual intercourse before marriage, about one-third of respondents thought that it was okay. One fifth said it could happen "as long as the couple love each other"; one fifth said "I would not do that, but I understand why others do"; 2.7% of college students said they thought people should be punished by laws or regulations for having sex before marriage.

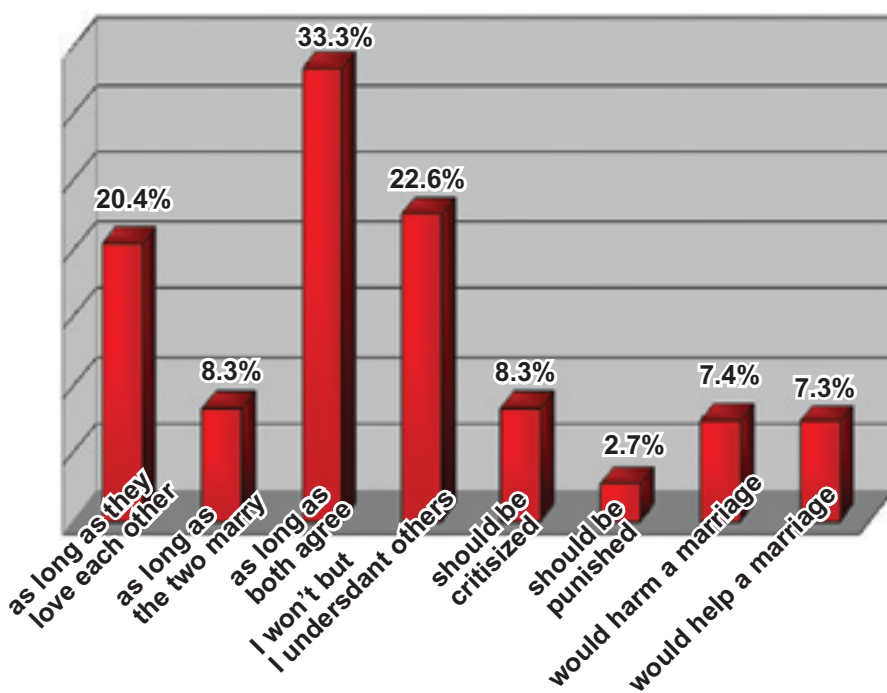
"The first time I made love with my girlfriend was in a hotel when we were travelling together," said a 22-year-old male

Students' Sexual Evolution

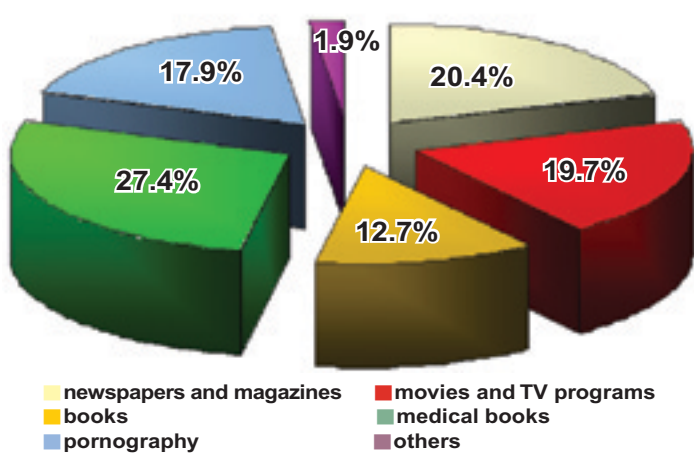
What materials about sex have college students read



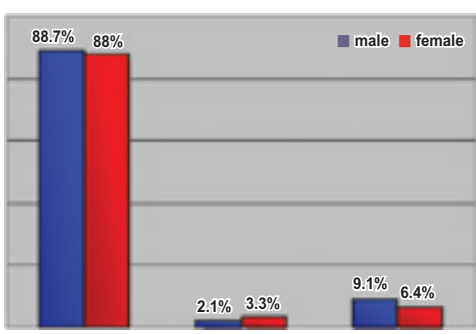
Opinions about sexual intercourse before marriage



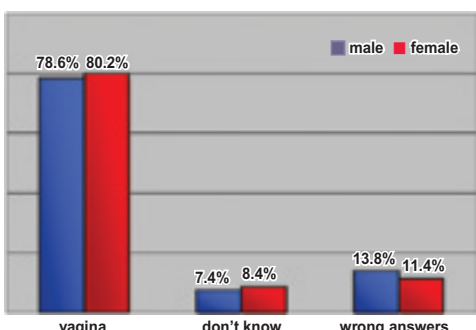
Major resource of sexual knowledge



Answers to where the fetus emerges



Answers to where the baby is born



college student who refused to reveal his name to *Beijing Today*. "I don't think it's that big a deal. I think making love before marriage is fine."

Education lags behind

The survey found there's still little sex education in Chinese colleges.

According to the survey, 36% of the students did not receive any sex education at college, while some 35% said their tutors had talked with them about love and marriage. 13% said their tutors had instructed them on sex in areas related to other courses. Only 6.6% of the participants said they had received scientific and thorough sex education at college.

"Our college does not have a specific course for sex education," Wang Ting, a female student, told *Beijing Today*. "A tutor teaching an ethics course touched on the subject when we were freshmen. I think our college teachers might suppose that we had these classes when we were in high school. We do, but only about the biology, such as what happens after the sperm meets the ovum; nothing to do with sexual intercourse. I think it is rather ridiculous."

So students have to learn what they want to know by themselves and must consult other sources. When asked what was their main resource for sexual knowledge, 20.4% said newspa-

pers and magazines; 19.7% chose movies and TV programs; 12.7% chose books; 27.4% chose medical books; and 17.9% chose pornography (including novels, web pages and video products).

But the survey found rather unsatisfying results in terms of what people actually knew. When filling out a test paper on 23 basic areas of sexual knowledge such as sexual intercourse, AIDS, rape and contraception, only 37% of the students knew them all; the number of male students who knew the answers was about 2.5 times that of the female students.

Less than one half of the participants knew all the correct positions of male and female sexual organs. Only 38.5% of female students knew all the correct answers, 18.5% less than their male schoolmates. While 87% of the participants claimed to know about fetal growth, many gave wrong answers to the questions in the survey.

About 42% of the participants who said they had had sexual intercourse did not use contraception. According to another survey at Beijing University involving 2,000 students, more than half did not know that much about contraception.

"The knowledge students get from pornography, movies and literature is not the same as scientific sexual knowledge," said Hu Zhen, sexologist and educa-

tionalist and the leader of the research group that conducted the survey. "This kind of 'self-instruction' cannot replace systematic sex education," she said.

Exploration

From 2002, a dozen colleges and universities opened sex health courses, basing them partly on the research conducted by Hu Zhen and her colleagues. According to Hu's survey in four Sichuan colleges in 2003, the course has had a positive effect among students.

After taking the course, more than two thirds of the students thought the course should be taught to all college students as a compulsory course; one fifth said it should at least be an optional course; 12.5% weren't sure, but only 1.6% of the participants said there was no need for such a course.

Nearly one third of the students said they felt lucky to have the chance to take such a course; 27% said they felt they knew something about sex before, but not as much as they thought.

"Sex is the most complicated, mysterious and subtle problem for human beings," said Hu in her report, "and we cannot expect short-term education to offer significant help to college students immediately. But at least we can teach them systematic and scientific sexual knowledge, which can help them to choose and make decisions."

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By Zhang Ran/Zeng Xiang

Forbes has put the cat among the pigeons again with another of its lists and China's top celebrities are falling over themselves to deny they're worth as much as the financial magazine claims, whether through modesty or concern about what the taxman is likely to make of it all. This list claims to identify the top Chinese celebrities of 2004, and is based not only on income but also on popularity and recognition. A chorus of dismissal has sounded throughout the ranks of China's best known entertainers, most of the people on the list claiming the figures are nonsense.

Basketball star Yao Ming tops the list, way ahead of stars such as Jet Li and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* actress Zhang Yimou.

The people on the list are mostly stars of the film and music industries. Income in 2003 was the biggest single factor in compiling the list and also the most controversial.

The 7-foot-6 Yao, now in his second season in the NBA, ranked first based on "heavy exposure in the media and web hits in China," the magazine said on its website. Yao also had the second-highest 2003 income among Chinese celebrities: US\$14.6 million.

The top earner was Jet Li, star of last year's action thriller "Cradle 2 The Grave", who raked in \$17 million in 2003. Still, Li ranked only 10th overall on the celebrity list.

Zhang Ziyi took second place on the list, followed by fellow actress Zhao Wei and Hong Kong-based singer-actress Faye Wong. Veteran film star Gong Li came in fifth, followed by Zhang Yimou, the award-winning director of *Raise the Red Lantern*.

The list, published in *Forbes*



Yao Ming



Zhang Ziyi



Zhao Wei



Faye Wong



Gong Li



Zhang Yimou



Zhou Xun



Leon Lai



Sun Nan



Jet Li

Stars Aflutter Over Forbes List

China, the magazine's Chinese-language version, was restricted to people born and raised in the Chinese mainland. Celebrities from Hong Kong, Taiwan and other parts of the Chinese-speaking world were excluded.

Despite that requirement, those listed were notable in that most achieved fame only after garnering an international audience.

"The list reflects the rapid growth in China's entertainment industry," list compiler Bobby Hao said in *Forbes*. "It's clear that more and more people from the mainland are making an impact and finding success overseas."

However, *Forbes'* list has been heavily criticized, both by the public and by the candidates

Appendix:China's top celebrities

Yao Ming	Power rank: 1	Industry: sports	2003 income: US\$14.6 million
Zhang Ziyi	Power rank: 2	Industry: film	2003 income: US\$3.2 million
Zhao Wei	Power rank: 3	Industry: film	2003 income: US\$2.3 million
Faye Wong	Power rank: 4	Industry: music	2003 income: US\$3.4 million
Gong Li	Power rank: 5	Industry: film	2003 income: US\$3.4 million
Zhang Yimou	Power rank: 6	Industry: film	2003 income: US\$2.2 million
Zhou Xun	Power rank: 7	Industry: film	2003 income: US\$1.5 million
Leon Lai	Power rank: 8	Industry: film	2003 income: US\$8 million
Sun Nan	Power rank: 9	Industry: music	2003 income: US\$2.9 million
Jet Li	Power rank: 10	Industry: film	2003 income: US\$17 million

themselves.

Some of the mainland's state-run media have described the ranking of entertainers by wealth as "nonsense". *China Daily* and Xinhua have both run critical reports of the list.

The Xinhua report said: "Entertainers across the nation began

casting doubt on financial figures used in the ranking and denouncing the whole exercise as nonsense." It quoted pop singer Han Hong, ranked 12th, as saying, "Even people with only a little knowledge of the entertainment

circles in China know it is impossible to earn that much in a year."

Other people on the list, including Shanghai dancer Huang Doudou, actress Deng Jie and actor Zhang Guoli, were also quoted as saying the magazine had incorrectly assessed their incomes.

"Some stars are sensitive over their income, maybe out of tax worries, while others are using this as an opportunity to do some public relations", said Jiao Guobiao, a professor with Peking University.

A *Beijing Star Daily* editorial described the *Forbes* list as "far from accurate", quoting an expert as saying, "*Forbes* is pursuing its commercial interests by taking advantage of the fame of celebrities".

Gay Hookers Exposed in Nanjing

Bar owner charged with providing male prostitutes for customers

By Sun Ming

The trial of a man charged with organizing male homosexual prostitution opened on February 6 in Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu Province. The defendant Li Ning is currently awaiting a second hearing which will be closed to the media.

According to Qinhuai District People's Court, Li, 34, the boss of Zhengqi Bar in Nanjing, allegedly hired male prostitutes to serve his male customers.

During the first hearing into the case on February 6, Li's lawyer Chen Yi pleaded not guilty, saying that China's current Criminal Law has no clear definition about homosexual prostitution, so there is no legal basis for charging Li.

Li was first arrested in August last year, but he was released a month later because local procuratorate departments in Nanjing had the same opinion as Li's lawyer.

Zhu Shizhen, the chief judge of the case, didn't announce when the second hearing would be held.

Homosexual prostitution gang uncovered

In early August last year, Nanjing police received a tip off that Zhengqi Bar was providing male prostitutes for gay customers. The police soon closed the bar located in Qinhuai District on August 17. Li, his assistant Leng Wei (pseudonym), and nine male prostitutes were arrested in the bar.

According to Nanjing police, Li first opened a bar called Hongdu with two other men in Xuanwu District, Nanjing in 1997. "Gradually, the bar became a popular hangout for gay men in the city," a policeman from Qinhuai District Police Station, who didn't give his name, told *Beijing Today* on Tuesday.

In September 1999, Hongdu Bar was sealed by police because erotic performances were being held there. However, Li soon opened a tea-house called Jinqilin in Qinhuai District three months later. In January 2000, Li changed the tea-house into a bar called Zhengqi and recruited more than

Before Zhang was arrested, he worked as a hairdresser during the daytime. He came to Li's bar to work as a male prostitute at night.

Local procuratorate departments thought that Chinese criminal law didn't have a clear definition as to homosexual prostitution. They said that according to the principle that there can be no punishment if there is no law specifying it, Li and his assistant had not committed the crime of organizing prostitution.

'According to Criminal Law, people who organize prostitution are breaking the law. This is not restricted to women,' said Qu Xinjiu, a legal professor from China University of Politics and Law.

10 male prostitutes aged around 18 and 19, while pretending to be looking for waiters for the bar.

Liu Fei (pseudonym), a gay man whom Li got to know in January 2003, assisted Li in managing the male prostitutes. Li confessed to police that Liu was his partner even though Li was married at the time.

Liu disappeared in July 2003, so Li appointed Leng Hua (pseudonym) to be his assistant. Leng not only managed the bar, but also provided homosexual services to customers.

To make a living

"The male prostitutes are not all gay, they just wanted to earn money," *Xiandai Kuaibao*, a Nanjing-based newspaper, said on February 4.

Zhang Jun (pseudonym), 20, revealed his experience of being a male prostitute to the newspaper after he was released from detention in September last year. Zhang was recruited with ten other male prostitutes by Li in January last year and he was arrested in the bar on August 17. He was detained for a week.

"I'm not gay, I just want to earn more money," said Zhang. Before Zhang was arrested, he worked as a hairdresser during the daytime.

He came to Li's bar to work as a male prostitute at night.

"We would not do anything immoderate in the bar other than drinking and chatting. We provided sexual services to customers in their apartment or hotel," said Zhang.

"They took my ID card away and 300 yuan as a deposit before I agreed to work at the bar. Also, if I didn't go out with customers, they would beat me or fine me."

Zhang admitted that compared with being a hairdresser, he could earn much more money as a male prostitute. The prices for overnight service were around 300 yuan. Zhang's customers included Chinese and foreigners.

What's the law?

Li's homosexual prostitution gang was finally broken up on August 17 last year when Nanjing Police detained Li and his assistant Leng and charged them with organizing prostitution.

However, Li was released in September.

"Local procuratorate departments thought that Chinese criminal law didn't have a clear definition as to homosexual prostitution. They said that according to the principle that there

Some stars are angry.

Zhang Yimou, director

Forbes put Zhang's annual income at 18 million yuan (US\$2.2 million). "This is nonsense," said Zhang Weiping, an investor in Zhang Yimou's movies. The film market was stagnant in recent years, and Zhang Yimou did not even get a bonus for *Hero*, said Zhang Weiping. He added that he had never revealed to the media how much he paid Zhang Yimou.

Yu/Quan, singers

"The tax authorities have begun to investigate us after a magazine said we earned 9 million yuan a year. Now *Forbes* says we earned 20 million yuan. It's just exaggerating. Such a celebrity list is not authoritative at all. If the so-called celebrity list triggers another tax investigation, we'll definitely sue *Forbes*," said the pop music duo.

Han Hong, singer

"Will *Forbes* make up for the balance of the 20 million yuan annual income, which they say we earned?" joked the singer's agent Zhang Xin. "Han Hong doesn't perform for commercials or TV series; how could she earn 20 million yuan in a year, especially in 2003, when SARS prevailed for a long period?" Han Hong contacted her lawyer about the veracity of the figure released by *Forbes* and the negative influence it might have, said the agent.

Wang Zhiwen, actor

Wang's agent denied the figures in the list. "Wang's income is much less than *Forbes* reported. Their figure is mere speculation."

Chen Lin, singer

Chen Lin ranked 29th with a reported annual income of 9 million yuan, but she said the figure was "ridiculous" and a "sky-high figure" for her. "What is the figure based on? The account books of our company records will clearly show my income is far below that."

Sun Nan, singer

Forbes said Sun earned 24 million yuan last year. Sun's agent said the figure was not possible. Last year Sun performed for only seven months, he said. "If Sun earns 200,000 yuan for each concert, he has to perform one concert every three days to earn 24 million yuan a year. *Forbes* did not interview anybody in our company," said the agent.

Zhao Benshan, comic actor

Zhao's agent said he was curious about how *Forbes* got to know Zhao's income, given that not even Zhao was not sure about his personal income.

Not everyone's unhappy

Zhang Ziyi, actress

Zhang Ziyi has not disputed the accuracy of the list. She said she was happy about the result. "It's recognition and encouragement for my work. You can not say that I'm better than others. I'm the youngest of all the candidates. What makes me happy is that people didn't forget me and my hard work," Zhang said.

Huang Doudou, dancer

Huang attributes his position on the list to two reasons: his years of industry have been rewarded and Chinese dancing is garnering more attention from abroad than before.

Li Xueqing, model

Mr. Fu, Li's agent, said Li was happy about being on the list although he had not earned as much as *Forbes* said.

Forbes' response

Fan Luxian, deputy chief-editor of *Forbes* China, stood by the figures in the list.

The figures were obtained by two means, said Fan. One was through interviewing the celebrities, their agents, managers of record companies, video producers, commercial agencies and other insiders. The other was through media coverage.

"The figure for income was calculated before money was paid to their agents, their company and all kinds of taxes and fees deducted. Some media did not make that clear," said Jeff Zhou, editor of *Forbes* China.

In responding to the accusation that *Forbes* was just using the stars' fame to pursue commercial interests, *Forbes* claimed it was doing no such thing.

"It's our first year in China. It doesn't surprise me that both stars and media pay attention to the list," said Mr. Zhou. "However, income is sensitive in China."



The old city of Hami in Xinjiang

By Shan Jinliang

Marco Polo is known all over the world as the greatest traveler in history, his tales of an exotic orient, far ahead of the west in culture and technology, enthralling people for centuries. The trouble is that so amazing were his observations of 13th century China that many people didn't believe them. Polo was dubbed "the man of a million lies", and even though much of what he recorded has subsequently been verified, doubts remain. It's even been suggested that he never came to China. There are certain things he surely would have noticed but never mentioned, for instance the Great Wall, and then there are his stories of huge birds that would pick up elephants, drop them from the sky and swoop to devour the smashed carcasses.

One Chinese photographer has decided to tackle these doubts by retracing the steps of Marco Polo, in particular his travels along the Silk Road. 70-year-old Weng Yi has spent the last 20 years researching the legend and has just published a book about it, *Walk from Pamir: Following the Footprints of Marco Polo*. Weng covered more than 26,636 kilometers in retracing the route and shot more than ten thousand photos.

"I want to promote Chinese culture in a way that embraces modern viewpoints and to show the greatness and wonder of the old country," Weng says. "Over 700 years have passed since then, and China has changed greatly," Weng writes in the preface to his book. "The astonishing splendor of the Khanbalig City that Marco Polo saw has been replaced by more splendid palaces and towers with a new and world famous name: Beijing."

During his work as a photographer for *China Sports Daily* for more than 30 years, Weng had the chance to visit more places in China than most people get to see. But he never had the time to look around properly. It was only after he retired in 1993 that he was able to focus on the splendid past of China.

Wanderlust

As a boy, Weng dreamed of becoming a doctor. He



Travellers in Time

Selections from the book



Tang encouraged Weng to record the travels of Marco Polo with his camera. On June 6, 1980, Weng took the train to Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi Province as his first step in his own journey to record the life of the Italian traveler. He contributed his photos to *Marco Polo in China*, a book published by Kingsway International Publications in 1981. From 1993, after his retirement, Weng started

Pamir Plateau is a remote, thinly populated place and used to be known as a home of thieves. Probably influenced by Marco Polo, I was nervous about my belongings on the way to Tajike Autonomous County. I asked a friend to look after my valuables, like cameras and money, but it turned out this wasn't necessary. As a border region, I found it had many tollgates and border sentries everywhere, not a thief in sight.

Following the system in the Song Dynasty, the Yuan Dynasty granted nobles and officials tablets made of gold, silver, copper and iron for use as a kind of ID, recognizing their status. Marco Polo would probably have been given a gold tablet by Kublai Khan, making it easy for him to travel around China in those strict times. The tablet would not only have permitted passage but also guaranteed treatment as an honored guest. I had to search through many museums in China before finding some remaining examples of these tablets.

"The wide desert" described by Marco Polo is the Taklamakan Desert, and it is also named the "Sea of Death" since numerous travelers have died in it. Now it's not so intimidating as it's traversed by the world's longest desert highway, and it takes only one day to cross.

certain prejudices about Chinese people," Weng told *Beijing Today*, "for instance saying that women from ethnic minorities in China were always trying to seduce men."

Weng also points out certain inconsistencies in Polo's historical records. Weng says Polo got some of his facts wrong in his version of the siege of Xiangyang in Hubei Province by the armies of Kublai Khan. But for the most part, he says, Polo's account is remarkably accurate.

In 1989, Weng would take his younger son with him on some of his travels but it became a more solitary pursuit for Weng as his son grew up and went to university.

A Chinese mission

Weng finally completed his journey in 2002. One year later, the US-based *National Geographic* decided to shoot a documentary about Marco Polo and invited Weng to act as the Chinese team leader to shoot half of the program.

When the *National Geographic* offered to offer with Weng on a new project on Marco Polo, Yan Jiangzheng, chairman of the China Association of Scientific Exploration, suggested to Weng that he should go it alone. Weng, who is also a member of the association, took the advice. In 2003, he finished writing the book and it was published in February 2004, in time to mark the 750th anniversary of the birth of Marco Polo.

Restless life

Though he's thin, Weng is in good health, having been active all his life. He walked along the Great Wall in 1993 and opened his own photo exhibition on this trip in Holland. He's also published a few books about photography and travel.

Weng told *Beijing Today* he's planning two photo exhibitions in Italy this year about Marco Polo. And he intends to travel further, into Greece, Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Israel, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, India, Vietnam and Sri Lanka.



A wooden road in Sichuan, where Weng searched for traces of Marco Polo.

making many more trips.

Marco Polo set out for China at the age of 17 with his father and uncle in 1271. They journeyed across land for nearly four years, passing through war zones, deserts and mountains before arriving in China in 1275. They would stay for the next 17 years and become favorites of the emperor, Kublai Khan.

"The hardship of their journey is hard to imagine," says Weng, who decided to set out for the Pamir Plateau in Xinjiang, where the Polos first arrived in China. Weng felt he needed to visit the infamous

Taklamakan Desert. It's better known as Luobupo today, but locals call it "The Sea of Death". Throughout his travels, Weng observed the spirit of Marco Polo, living with local people, talking to them and getting to know their local customs.

A new understanding

Weng gradually came to his own conclusions about Marco Polo, through reading different versions of his life and local historical records and by using his instincts as a journalist to sift through the layers of myth and embellishment.

"Marco Polo did have a tendency to boast and had

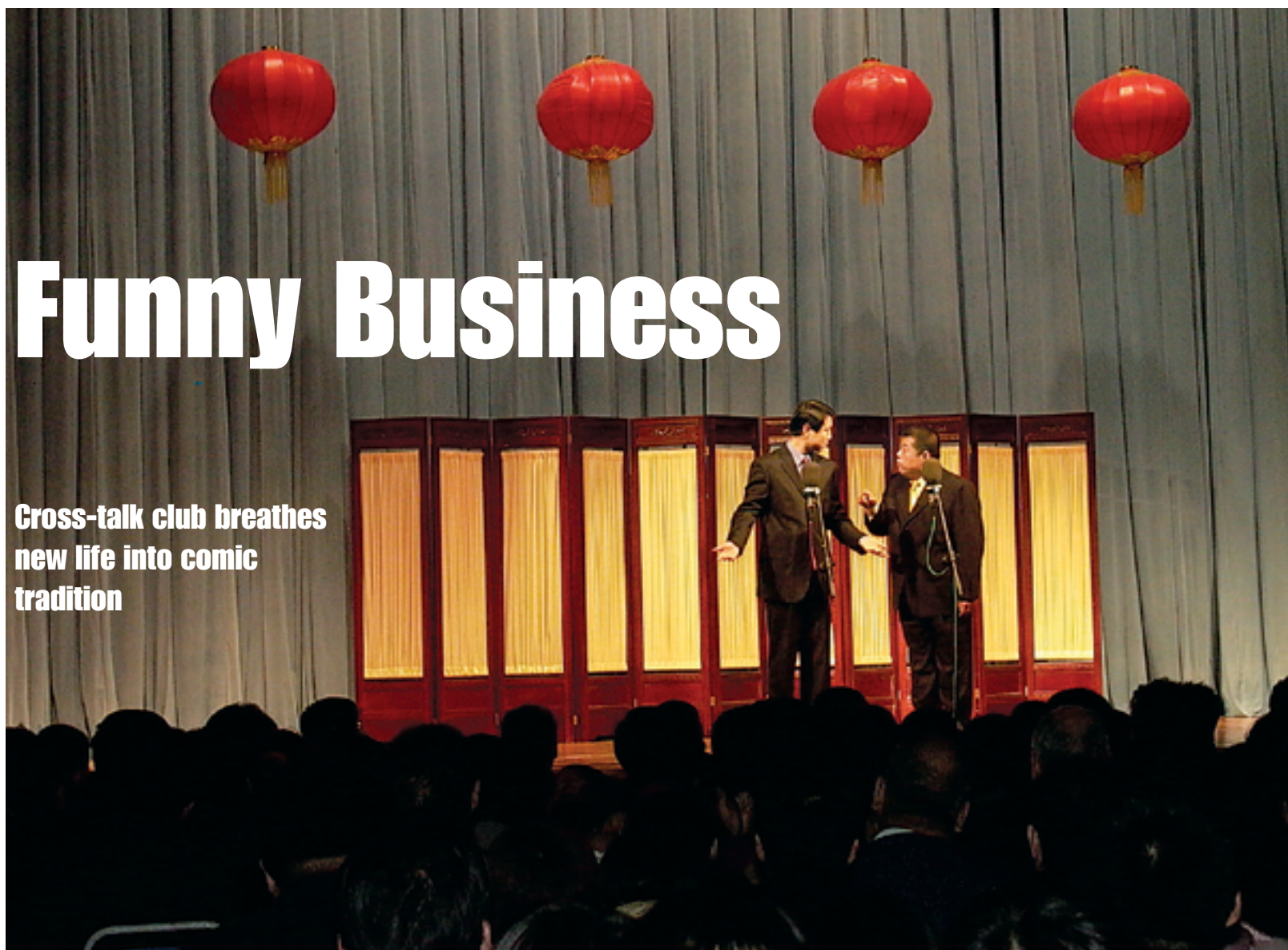


Weng at Helan Mountain in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region

Photos provided by Weng Yi

Funny Business

Cross-talk club breathes new life into comic tradition



Jia Lun (left) and Li Jinxiang, two young *xiangsheng* performers on stage at the Xiangsheng Weekend Club

Photos by Tian Xiaotong

By Zhao Pu

The success of the Xiangsheng Weekend Club since its launch in October last year has put smiles on the faces of both exponents and fans of the comic form *xiangsheng*, or cross-talk. "We are bringing xiangsheng back to where it really belongs to, in front of a live audience," club founder Song Dequan told *Beijing Today* in an interview last Friday.

Song is a 47-year-old actor with the China Coal Mine Art Troupe, who has been performing cross-talk since the age of 14. The idea of establishing such a club came to Song a year ago when talking with a fellow artist who had recently performed in the US. An American had asked this friend where he could go to see a cross-talk performance when he visited China. The artist was embarrassed by this simple question. "We have no stage for traditional folk arts now," says Song, "that's a shame."

Determined to do something about this situation, Song contacted the Dongcheng District Cultural Center and asked about the availability of a suitable venue. As it happened, their theatre was available on Saturday nights, for a very low rent, and so the Xiangsheng Weekend Club was established. "It's better to

do something than sit and wait for the audience to come back to us. Every actor willing to come and perform are our club members," says Song.

There are about 100 xiangsheng actors in Beijing, ranging in age from twenty- to eighty-something. Almost every one of them has volunteered to perform at the club. Song, who organizes the program every week, receives many calls from actors in Beijing, Tianjin and other cities, keen to appear on the stage. "We are the first xiangsheng club in China. We are holding the xiangsheng actors together," Song says with pride.

Many attribute the decline of xiangsheng and other traditional folk arts to television, however Song does not entirely agree. "In fact, television helped introduce xiangsheng, an art born in Beijing, to the whole country" he claimed. "But television imposes certain limits on xiangsheng performance."

The creation of a mature xiangsheng piece requires three steps, according to Song: the initial writing of the script, further development and interpretation by the actors, and subsequent polishing based on feedback from audiences in stage performances. Televised xiangsheng goes through only

the first two steps.

"So what we need to do to revive the art of xiangsheng is bring it back to the stage and a live audience," says Song. "Moreover, a standard xiangsheng work goes for around 20 minutes or even longer, whereas the televised xiangsheng routines are usually required to be shortened to no more than five minutes. That makes the story much less fleshy."

The real causes for the decline of xiangsheng is the lack of good writers and young actors, Song says. Compared with TV dramas, for which there is a huge market and writers can earn more money and fame, writing xiangsheng offers only modest rewards. "There are only a handful of xiangsheng writers in Beijing, and each of them writes only two or three new stories a year on average. So the lack of new material is a problem for us," says Song.

Most xiangsheng actors aged 50 or more know at least 50 routines, but very few young actors can perform more than 10, according to Song. Lack of opportunity to hone ones' skills through practice and performance is a common problem for today's young actors.

So the most crucial thing is to return the art to the stage,

Background: Xiangsheng

The Chinese form of comic dialogue known as *xiangsheng* originated in the late Qing Dynasty, around 100 years ago.

Routines often take a satirical slant on current social issues. They typically feature two performers, although solo routines are not uncommon, and nowadays, performances involving three or more artists are also becoming popular.

Usually, there is a lead actor, helped by the supporting actor, who provokes laughter from the audience with funny remarks. A skilled cross-talk artist must possess four basic skills: he should be able to talk with machine-gun-like speed, do imitations, should never be lost for words and should also be able to sing competently.



Renowned *xiangsheng* actors Chang Baohua (left) and Zhao Shizhong

where the old and young actors can communicate, and more importantly, the actors can communicate with the audience. As to the lack of writers, Song is planning to hold a training course for aspiring xiangsheng writers next month. "We will enroll some talented amateur writers to attend the course, which will be taught by a number of renowned writers from all over the country, and select the best works to be performed at our club."

To date, the club has presented 20 Saturday night performances, and the audience keeps

growing. Last Saturday, the 400 seats in the theatre were all taken, with some late comers having to stand at the back.

Tickets to the two-and-a-half hour performance are 20 yuan, and every show features some celebrated older artists. After the performance, the actors line up by the entrance to thank the audience as they depart. "The xiangsheng I enjoyed here is closer and more interesting than that on TV," said Bian Jiali, a 12-year-old xiangsheng fan after last Saturday's performance.

Buddhist Music on World Tour

By Wang Jingzhong

More than 60 monks from the Chinese mainland left for Taiwan Sunday. They will perform Chinese Buddhist music together with their local counterparts and later embark on a world tour to bring this mysterious and enchanting music to both religious and secular audiences in other countries.

This is the first time for such a joint tour to be organized involving monks from both sides of the Taiwan Straits.

The troupe will stage three performances in Taiwan before flying to Macao and Hong Kong, and will then travel to Los Angeles and San Francisco in the United States and Vancouver, Canada.

The 100 or so monks that make up the troupe come from Buddhist temples including Mount Foguangshan in Taiwan, Wutai Temple in Shanxi Province and Shaolin Temple in Henan Province, representing the three main branches of Buddhism in China, namely, Han, Tibetan and Southern or Pali Buddhism.

Buddhist music, which originated from ancient India, found its way to China some 2,000 years ago, and after absorbing elements of traditional Chinese folk music, court music and other religious music, the form now known as Chinese Buddhist music came into being.

"The Buddhist music of the Chinese mainland has a more traditional flavor, while that of Taiwan is more appealing to a secular audience," artistic director of the troupe and a professor with the Chinese Art Institute Tian Qing told Xinhua.

Tian explained that this is because the Buddhist music played in Taiwan also combines chanting and dancing, adding that he was confident the joint performance would be fascinating as all genres of the Chinese Buddhist music were to be exhibited, including the renowned Shaolin martial arts.

Sheng Hui, vice president of the Chinese Buddhism Association and head of the troupe told Xinhua, "Both Buddhism and the Buddhist music of the Chinese mainland and Taiwan have the same root, although they differ a little in form."

"I hope the joint performance will further enhance ties between Buddhists and people across the Taiwan Strait and bring peace and prosperity to the region and the world through Buddhist prayer for tolerance, peace and harmony," said Sheng.

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By Yu Shanshan

Vagina, it seems, is a word taboo enough to justify the cancellation of a performance of Eve Ensler's celebrated play *The Vagina Monologues* at the Today Art Gallery last Saturday.

The play was meant to be the centerpiece in the gallery's activities for V-Day, an annual event held on February 14 around the world intended to address issues of violence and discrimination against women. The last-minute ban slapped on *The Vagina Monologues* left the gallery's staff scrambling to fill the bill and sapped the whole activity of much of its power.

Zhang Baoquan, president of Antaeus Investment (Group) Company, which owns the Today Art Gallery, speculated afterwards that the government took its hard-line stance in response to the play's repeated use of the word "vagina," which is literally said hundreds of times. The point, he explained to *Beijing Today*, is to make the word seem regular, to erase the taboos generally placed on it by society.

The local cancellation was not an isolated incident. Just four days before, the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center received notice from the Shanghai government preventing them from going forward with a series of performances of *The Vagina Monologues* from February 10 to March 10. Director Lei Guohua told the Guangzhou-based *New Express* newspaper on Thursday that the show would still take the stage in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province in May.

"This kind of end is a real shame," said Zhang Baoquan, "This is a serious play that calls for women to spend their lives creating and thriving rather than surviving and or recovering from terrible atrocities."

The gallery received notice of the ban on Wednesday, too late for organizers to find an adequate substitute act for the Saturday event. In the end, they invited a friend to put on a demonstration of flamenco dance, but did not charge and returned the money for all previously purchased tickets.

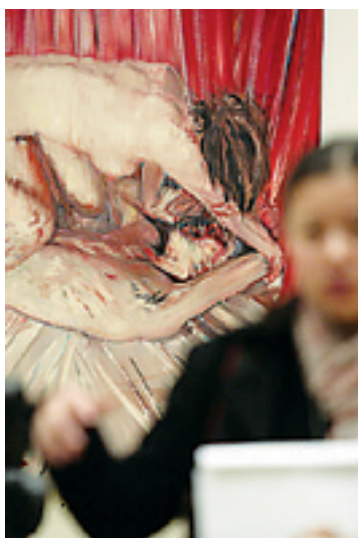
The absence of the play noticeably lessened the impact (and audience) of the other activities, though the background exhibition of 11 artists' paintings and sculptures dealing with issues related to women's lives and struggles was still provocative and challenging.

The artists' collective goal, according to sculptor Wang Xiaohui, was to "let people see the reality of women's lives and deep passion, which most people ignore." A major theme was violence enacted against women and girls as well as other dam-



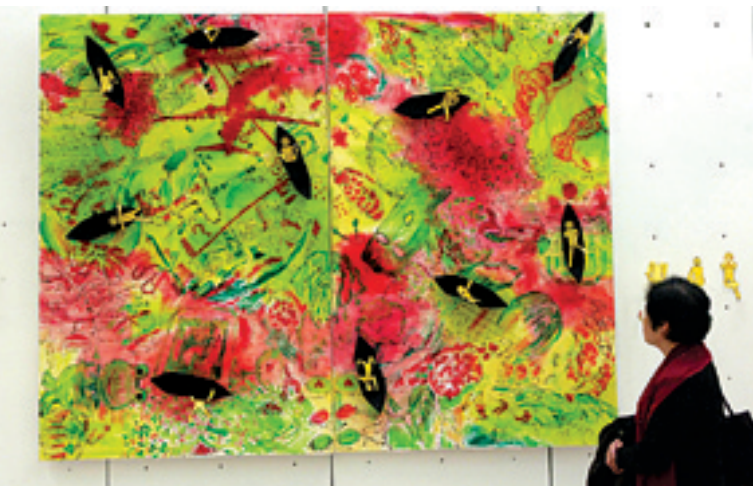
Yin Zhaoyang, Paradise Lost No. 1, oil on canvas, 200x150 cm

Vagina Verboten, But V-Day Show Goes On



Yin Zhaoyang, Paradise Lost No. 2, oil on canvas, 130x150 cm

Photos by Jia Ting



Wang Tiantian, Picture of the Floating World-ukiyo-e, oil on canvas, 240x200 cm

age inflicted by men and society.

Some works, such as Zhang Yonghong's oil paintings *Under the Light*, *Solo Woman* and *Cure Pain* and Zhou Yuan's oil painting series *Wave*, depictions of women standing in glass bottles floating in the middle of the sea, used light colors and casual arrangements to convey senses of loneliness and sorrow. Along the same lines was *Sketch* by Shen Ling, a series of 30 rough sketches portraying naked women at home, leaning over tables or lying in bed, some alone and others accompanied by naked men. Some works carried a few poetic lines meant to convey and add depth to the feelings of the women depicted.

Stronger statements were made by other works, particularly paintings in Luan Weili's *Lotus* series and Yin Zhaoyang's *Paradise Lost* series. In *Lotus*, plump breasts grow out from lotus plants in paintings enveloped in thick red hues with palpable feelings of heat and vitality. According to the artist, the pieces are meant as metaphors for women's relationships and roles in modern life and the prices sometimes paid for taking bold steps towards true independence and creativity.

More brutal in their directness were the oil paintings of Yin Zhaoyang, the sole male artist to contribute to the show. Many works in his *Paradise Lost* series depict terrible scenes of rape on muddled backgrounds. "I have tried to find a visual method to make expressions about expectations, hurt and depression in the process of growth," he was quoted as saying in the introduction to the 2002 exhibition "Cruel Youth," written by art critic and curator Zhu Qi.

The watercolor and ink paintings of Dou Mingya offered relief from Yin's confrontational style. Dou's paintings, such as *Guang Hua Deng* (*Strolling in a Lantern Show*) and *Huolang Tu* (*Picture of a Vendor*), portray women from ancient times in humorous and friendly light.

Emperors or Rebels?

Time article addresses identity of China's 80's generation

By Yu Shanshan

Chinese born in the 1980s were slated to be the first generation of "little emperors," products of the one-child policy initiated in 1979. Like Generation X in the West, they were expected to possess minimal senses of responsibility, high degrees of self-absorption and little resilience to difficult times.

Yet such prejudiced predictions have ended up far from true. Many sociologists have decided that kids of the '80s are strong and creative enough to find their own paths and set their own values while navigating the unprecedented possibilities opened by China's economic explosion. The prospects and viewpoints of this generation of up-and-comers was put in the international limelight when addressed in the article "The New Radicals" in the January 26 issue of *Time* magazine.

The story, written by Hannah Beech, follows five young people, writers Han Han and Chun Shu, punk rocker Li Yang, computer programmer Wu Wei and computer hacker Man Zhou, who stand at the cutting-edge of Chinese society. Despite the range of their fields, they all have one thing in common – they dropped out of high school and have found "cool" ways to live their lives far from the traditional routine.

Han Han explained the choice to leave school, an idea anathema to the previous generation, in a near mantra of the kids of the 80's: "It's my choice to do what I want and go where I want. Nobody can tell me what to do."

Unlike their parents, children of the 80s grew up caring more about individual identity than collective politics. "People born in the 1970s are concerned about how to make money, how to enjoy life," Chun Shu was quoted as saying in *Time*, "But people born in the 1980s are worried about self-expression, how to choose a path that fits one's own individual identity."

To describe this identity, the *Time* article repeatedly uses the word *linglei*, a term in heavy circulation around China these days. "In the past, the word was derogatory, connoting a disreputable hooligan, but this year the *Xinhua New Word Dictionary*, official arbiter of what is linguistically acceptable, amended the definition of *linglei* to just mean an alternative lifestyle, without an accompanying sniff of disapproval," writes Beech.

Time also revealed that these social rebels still face great pressure to conform to convention and sometimes end up saddled with unexpected responsibility. Man Zhou, who is a computer hacker has the most *linglei* profession of the five, is now studying computer science at Shanghai's prestigious Fudan University. On the side, he operates a search engine software firm, registered under a false name so that he can skirt university regulations. Opening the company has forced the 21-year-old Man to accept real responsibility, not only for himself but for his several employees.

"At first, I thought I had limitless choices in my life," Man said. "But then I realized that *linglei* need to grow up and adapt to society."

Time's choice to give this generation a global soapbox greatly pleased young writer Chun Shu. "I was very lucky (to be on *Time's* cover)!" she told the *Beijing News* last Tuesday. "They chose to put *linglei* in the title, but I seldom think about whether I am *linglei* or not. The most important thing for people is to simply be themselves."

At the end of the *Beijing News* interview, Chun made a call to her comrades not to abandon their radical ways and "revolutionary cause". "I will not be changed by reality," she concluded.



Rebel writer Chun Shu on the cover January 26's Time

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加裕华装饰

By Wang Xiaoxiao

Li Shaohong's much-anticipated movie *Baober in Love* has turned out not to be the Valentine's Day romance many lovers who rushed to see it last weekend expected.

The bloody ending, when Baober (Zhou Xun) commits suicide, was especially shocking for many couples.

Though the movie proved something of a downer for a romantic day, there were no reports of cinema audiences leaving before the end. While many described it as a tragedy, because of the gory finale, Li Shaohong has her own understanding of what the end means. "To me, such an end just testifies to the inconsistency of love. You can feel how crazy love can be," she was quoted as saying in *Beijing Star Daily* on Valentine's Day.

Baober in Love meanwhile won applause at the 54th Berlin International Film Festival. "I like this movie quite a lot, I see the progress of Chinese movies and the effort the Chinese filmmakers have made," English film critic Tony Rayns told Yahoo.

Scary Love Movie



Zhou Xun and Huang Jue

A Not So Miserable Hugo

By Dong Nan

Ninety-three, one of Victor Hugo's last and greatest novels, will be performed as a drama by the National Theater this April. The cast and crew began rehearsals last Friday.

"Hugo's analysis of the French revolution in this novel is still valuable today," said director Wang Zuixi in an interview with *Beijing Youth Daily*.

Wang said that guillotine was an important symbol in his adaptation of *Ninety-three*. Three scenes key scenes center on the guillotine — when Louis XVI is sent to be executed, when Robespierre sends Danton to his death, and the climax of the story, when the hero the Vicomte de Gauvain is sent to the guillotine. The audience would also be captivated by the dramatic interplay between Robespierre, Danton and Marat, Wang promised.

Renowned actor Guo Tao will play the role of the Marquis of Lantenac, an elderly aristocrat who is fighting to restore the regime of which he is a part. When asked how he would interpret the spirit of a 70-year-old stubborn royalist, the 30-year-old actor told *Beijing Youth Daily*, "I think modern drama pays less attention to the reality of history. The most important thing is my own understanding of the character."

The script was adapted for the stage by playwright Cao Lusheng. Cao told *Beijing Youth Daily* that his script was mainly based on Zheng Yonghui's 1957 translation, and focuses on the role of Gauvain. He also revealed that a chorus would be used to make the story more like a tragic epic.

With Love, From Jin Haixin

By Dong Nan

Thousands of fans converged on Shiguang Suidao Bar in Yayuncun on the afternoon of Valentine's Day, for a

romantic date with their idol Jin Haixin. The occasion was the release of Jin's new, self-titled album.

Though the ceremony was



By Wang Yao

The un-abreviated name of Q-ki is Queen you King I, meaning "you are the queen and I am the king."

Young, fashionable looking a firmly in the middle of the road musically, after

Rock Review Young Queens and Kings

two years of careful grooming by their recording company, Kirin Kid Productions, Q-ki



scheduled for two o'clock, fans started queuing outside the door from the early morning, according to representatives from Warner, Jin's record label.

Jin sang seven songs from the new album, including the hit *Duitashuo (Talk to Him)*, which was inspired by Pedro Almodovar's *Talk to Her*. Her ever sweet and clear voice won enthusiastic applause from her devoted fans.

Jin Haixin is the rising star's third album and her first since she signed with Warner, following *Ba Erduo Jiaoxing (Wake up You Ears)* and *Name Jiaobao (So Proud)*, which she recorded for Sony Music in 1999 and 2000.

WORLDWIDE



Justin Timberlake

Timberlake and Beyonce Big Brit Award Stars

Justin Timberlake, the night of his infamous "wardrobe malfunction" duet with Janet Jackson just a memory, on Tuesday landed two of the top awards at the Brits, the UK record industry's big night of the year.

The American singer had been all contrition after the outrage that greeted his intimate Super Bowl duet with Jackson which ended with her exposing a breast live on television.

At London's Earls Court venue, he was on best behavior and whooping with delight at his latest success. "Wow! Two awards in one night. That is awesome," he told fans. (Reuters)



Courtney Love

Courtney Love in Court, Dodges Arrest Warrant

Rocker Courtney Love dodged an arrest warrant on Tuesday when she showed up in a Beverly Hills courtroom for a hearing on charges of possessing two prescription painkillers.

Love last week skipped hearings in two criminal cases, prompting a judge to issue a bench warrant for her arrest. She later told radio talk show host Howard Stern that she stayed home because she lacked a professional bodyguard.

The warrant was withdrawn on Tuesday by Beverly Hills Superior Court Judge Lisa Hart Cole when Love, wearing dark sunglasses and accompanied by a new attorney, turned up for the brief court session. (Reuters)

Madonna Locks Up Prison Film

Madonna's Maverick Films is prepping a feature based on the real-life events surrounding the 1971 *Stanford Prison Experiment*, sources said.

The project follows the infamous experiment conducted by professor Philip Zimbardo at Stanford University to explore the psychology of evil by recruiting 12 college students to role-play prison guards and inmates. Zimbardo's experiment was discontinued when the participants began taking on their roles with harrowing results. (Reuters)

cruiting 12 college students to role-play prison guards and inmates. Zimbardo's experiment was discontinued when the participants began taking on their roles with harrowing results. (Reuters)



Madonna

EMI Moves to Halt 'White Album' Remixes

EMI Group is taking action to prevent circulation of unauthorized remixes of the Beatles' *White Album*.

According to insiders, the London-based major has served cease-and-desist orders to the DJ behind the *Gray Album*, and to various retailers and online outlets offering the remix.

LA based producer and DJ Danger Mouse's self-proclaimed "art project and experiment" marries vocals from Jay-Z's *Black Album* with music from the Beatles' celebrated recording. (Billboard)

Dido to Begin North American Tour in May

English pop singer Dido has confirmed details of a North American tour in support of her new Arista album, *Life for Rent*. The trek will begin May 17 in Vancouver and has dates booked through June 18 in Boston.

Life for Rent debuted at No. 4 on The Billboard 200 last October and has sold nearly 1.5 million copies in the US, according to Nielsen SoundScan. The album has been an international smash, having spent 18 non-consecutive weeks at No. 1 on the European Top 100 Albums chart. (Reuters)



Dido

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Distant Secrets

By Jiang Yongzhu

Over the thousands of years of its history, the "roof of the world" has been the scene of countless dramatic changes. The Linzhen store, a specialist in Tibetan antiques, gives consumers in the capital chances to literally get a piece of Tibetan history to deepen their understanding of the culture while adding beauty and mystery to their homes or offices.

Antiques in the store's collection range from furniture to ritual objects. The oldest is an ancient cabinet with origins in the Ming Dynasty (1368- 1644). Despite its many years, its exterior is remarkably bright and intact thanks to the use of outstanding mineral paint. Many of the furniture pieces are decorated with vivid paintings, normally with motifs drawn from Buddhist scripture, legendary tales, traditional ceremonies or nature.

Cabinet, 4,000 yuan

Proprietor Ma Jianhua grew up in Tibet and has been an avid collector of Tibetan antiques since he was a teen. Besides furniture, his collection also includes an impressive assortment of ritual objects. On hand are examples of nearly every object needed in major Tibetan ceremonies, such as prayer wheels, drums, bells and *dorje*, or bell-strikers. Bells and *dorje* always are used in conjunction in ceremonies, as together they symbolize the union of compassion and wisdom and the merging of male and female.

Close inspection pays off in this entrancing store, as even small corners are likely to house some remarkable odd or end, be it a bead or a cup. Each item has a story, which Ma is only too happy to recount.

Where: Dongsanhuan Nanlu, west of Huaweiqiao intersection, Chaoyang **Open:** 9 am - 6 pm **Tel:** 8769 3771



Cabinet, 4,000 yuan



Bell and dorje, 620 yuan



Ritual object, 450 yuan

Mysteries of Tibet

Treasures From the Roof of the World

By Jiang Yongzhu

The Lanshe store on Xisi Dajie is like a small corner of Tibet tucked away in the capital. Bathed in soft light from paper lanterns and the soothing scent of Tibetan incense, the store is a pleasant place to check out authentic Tibetan items or just relax and take a breather.

Owner Liu Dong, a student at People's University, was inspired to open the store after making a life-changing journey to Tibet. "I opened this store and sell things at reasonable prices so that more people can enjoy the beauty of Tibetan crafts and culture," he explained.

The shelves are stocked with a variety of items, from earrings to handbags, in a wide range of styles. What they have in common is that every piece has been brought in from Tibet and is hand-made.

The jewelry collection makes creative and attractive use of carnelian, lapis lazuli, turquoise and silver, relatively common materials in Tibetan finery, as well as elusive and very precious *dzi* beads. These rare stones are said to have fallen to Earth from deep space. Tibetans believe they possess potent protective powers and can help prevent disease, ward off evil and issue in good fortune.

Other items with purported auspicious powers are *gau*, delicate amulets worn by many Tibetans. *Gau* are small, light lockets of sterling silver that normally come engraved with the symbol that normally come engraved with the words of the six syllable mantra, *Om mani padme hum*. The lockets can be opened to hold small written prayers to up their effectiveness. *Gau*, like most Tibetan crafts, are closely connected to the religion and culture of the region, making stores like Lanshe windows on the beautiful traditions of the people of the distant plateau.

Where: No.49 Xisi Nandajie, Xicheng **Open:** 9:30 am -10:30 pm **Tel:** 6603 2003



Silver necklace, 58 yuan



Yak bone necklace, 65 yuan



Silver bangle, 25 yuan



Yak bone bangle, 30 yuan

Tibetan Tidbits

By Lisa Lee

Great location and a specialty in Tibetan handicrafts have spelled success for a small store on the banks of Houhai, the popular lake in the center of the capital.

The interior of the store is decorated like a Buddhist prayer room with a large picture of the Buddha hanging on the wall and an altar decorated with ritual

items such as bells and fruit offerings.

The owner of the store, a native of Tibet named Luo Sang, has established his own brand of authentic products, Heaven Produce. The Houhai store is a branch of his original, which stands on Qianmen Dajie.

All the products on sale are steeped in Tibetan flavor, designed by Luo himself and hand-crafted by his father, meaning each is a one-off. One of the most striking pieces is a wall hanging



Embroidered wall hanging, 1,300 yuan

embroidered with the eight traditional Tibetan symbols, including double fish, a lotus and a prayer wheel, all of which are believed to ward off evil and bring peace, wealth and health. The base material is top-grade silk and the embroidery is done by hand with golden thread, justifying the price of 1,300 yuan.

Beautiful clothes with

distinct Nepalese and Indian styles occupy another section of the store. There is also a wide range of smaller items, particularly jewelry, with rings, earrings, bracelets and necklaces made of silver, turquoise, bone and coral fetching 20 to 600 yuan a piece.



Indian gauze shawl, 530 yuan

Where: No. 41 Qianmendajie, Chaoyang No. 14, south bank of Houhai, across from the north gate of Beihai Park **Open:** 10 am - 9 pm (both stores) **Tel:** 13901363482

Online shoppnig

Shop Tibet through the Internet

By Yu Shanshan

Of the many online stores that offer Tibetan clothes, jewelry and home decorations, Luosang.com may not be the cheapest, but it does offer an almost unrivaled range of choices.

Products for sale on Luosang.com are divided into five major categories, shown on the left

column of its home page, and each category is then broken down into specific sub-groups.

The site recently added nine new pairs of talismans aimed for a certain romantic holiday to the already extensive collection featuring talismans shaped like or bearing patterns of snakes, hawks,



Hemp scarf, 76 yuan

prayer wheels and Tibetan deities, most priced from 68 yuan to 260 yuan, though some shoot as high as 588 yuan.

Other small, attractive pieces on offer include exotic lockets made of turquoise, agate and red coral

that fetch 69 yuan to 950 yuan a piece. Bracelets cast in pure silver and decorated with a similar selection of semi-precious stones go for 135 yuan to 690 yuan.

Though similarly lustrous, Ti-

betan silver items are far less expensive than pure silver versions. Talismans in this alloy, otherwise identical to those described above, cost just 27 to 75 yuan, while bracelets range in price from 39 yuan to 80 yuan.

Luosang.com's real strength is its collection of Tibetan decorations for the home, from intricate *thanka* paintings (99 yuan to 260 yuan) to striking hanging masks (45 to 950 yuan). Be sure to



Handmade oxbide shoes

check out the copper offerings, particularly a pair of vases bearing delicately engraved designs (325 yuan), an attractive jewelry box (125 yuan) and a distinctively Tibetan teapot (500 yuan).

The clothing section of the site houses an impressive selection of handmade Tibetan-style garments, including two pairs of beautiful oxbide shoes (195 yuan) and traditional alms bowls (395 yuan).

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Pineapple Queen

By Huo Xia

After more than eight years working as a bartender, Sun Lei, known to friends and customers as Marty, has worked his way through more bars than he can recall, yet remains smitten enough with the profession that he wants to do nothing else.

His passion for mixology began when, as an elementary school student, he saw a TV program in which a dexterous barkeep deftly juggled a bottle of booze. "I know now it was a relatively simple trick for a good bartender, but at the time, I thought it looked so cool," Marty told *Beijing Today*.

So impressed was the young Marty that he began his own independent course of studies, working nights as a barkeep in local bars as a teenager. When he enrolled in professional school after graduating high school, he signed up for a major in drink making without a second thought.

Only when he really entered the life, however, did Marty come to understand the true challenges of tending bar well. For one thing, being a good bartender takes encyclopedic knowledge of drink names, histories and recipes and mastery of the skills of pouring and presentation. Inspired by his boyhood idol, Marty has also trained himself to juggle bottles and otherwise turn pouring into a dramatic performance.

Of course, some lessons were more painful to learn than others. One day while practicing his bottle tossing with some friends, an airborne bottle suddenly crashed onto Marty's forehead. The bottle broke and a glass shard made a deep cut into his eyebrow. For the following six months, he was filled with fear every



Marty doing one of his easier tasks as a bartender

time he pitched a bottle into the air.

Marty can testify that mixology mastery comes only from daily, patient practice. He makes each drink at least 40 times before he is confident in the consistency of the results. At the Outback Steakhouse restaurant inside the Beijing Hotel, where he currently tends bar, his boss expects all barkeeps to be able to pour exact measures and hires and fires depending on such performance. "If you make two mistakes in one day, then you cannot make drinks the rest of the day," Marty said.

Despite such rigor, Marty is still enamored with his chosen profession. "The biggest attraction of this job is that it's all is up to me – the performance, what I talk about with customers, creating new drinks, it's all my decision. I think that's very cool and free," he pitched with a smile.

Professional bartending is obviously challenging, but amateur mixing of some favorite cocktails does not need to be. Below, Marty has provided *Beijing Today* with a few recipes for delicious drinks that, with a bit of practice, are fun to make and imbibe in the comfort of home. (Note that one measure equals the contents of a basic shot glass, or 30 milliliters.)

Pineapple Queen**Ingredients:**

2 measures white wine
2 measures sparkling wine
ice

pineapple juice

Procedure:

Fill a tall glass with ice. Pour in white wine and sparkling

wine, top with pineapple juice.

Rusty Nail**Ingredients:**

1 measure Scotch
3/4 measure Drambuie
ice

Procedure:

In a brandy balloon, pour scotch and then Drambuie over a generous helping of ice.

Mind Eraser**Ingredients:**

1 measure kahlua
3/4 measure vodka
1 measure soda water
ice
cocktail straw

Procedure:

Fill a glass with ice. Pour in Kahlua, vodka and soda water, in that order. Serve as a shooter and drink through a straw for best flavor and effect.

Sea Breeze**Ingredients:**

1 1/4 measure vodka
3 measures grapefruit juice
1 measures cranberry juice
ice

Procedure:

Fill a tall glass with ice. Add the vodka, then the grapefruit juice and top with a splash of cranberry juice.

Melon Ball**Ingredients:**

1 measure vodka
3/4 measure melon liquor (like Midori)
ice
orange slice

Procedure:

Fill glass with ice, then add booze. Garnish with orange slice.

Below are some local bars or restaurants that Marty and *Beijing Today* recommend for enjoyable nights of cocktail drinking.

The Loft

An attractive melding of modern decor with classic drinks.

Where: 4 Gongti Beilu, Chaoyang **Open:** 11-2 am **Tel:** 6501 7501

Aria

Excellent wine and cocktail selection and great half-price nightly happy hours from 6-9 pm.

Where: China World Hotel **Tel:** 6605 2266 ext. 36

Flair Chivas

A swank Korean-style bar with flashy drinks and juggling bartenders.

Where: inside north gate

Mardi Gras Mixology

By Chen Si

In most of the world, winter is not a time for heavy drinking of cocktails, but then New Orleans in the southern US has never been known for conformity. The city is already gearing up for this year's running of its world-famous week long bash, Mardi Gras, always a scene of hard partying, heavy drinking and general debauchery.

Though New Orleans is literally thousands of miles from Beijing, residents of the capital can get a little flavor of the festivities thanks to the Big Easy bar and restaurant

at the south gate of Chaoyang Park. This local institution not only looks like it was plucked straight from New Orleans' historic French Quarter, it serves up authentic food and drink of its inspiration and namesake.

Mardi Gras, which translates directly to "Fat Tuesday", always falls on the Tuesday exactly 46 days before the start of Easter and the day before Ash Wednesday, which marks the start of Lent. The whole point is to get in as much fun as possible before having to endure the abstemiousness of Lent.

In New Orleans, the event is celebrated with massive parades with fake royalty and others riding floats and throwing different trinkets, such as small toys, candy and most notoriously beads, to the crowd. Evenings around Mardi Gras dissolve into massive street parties, with thousands upon thousands of people staggering the streets, dancing, bar hopping and generally getting crazy.

Obviously, the Big Easy's version is not nearly as grand, but it still presents a fun opportunity to cut loose on a Tuesday night and soak up some Mardi Gras vibes. The bar will hold a costume ball, bring in professional dancers for a hot performance, run a lucky draw with top prizes of two air tickets to New Orleans and offer killer live music all night by the tight house band and other special guests.

By no means will the drinking be overlooked, and the Big Easy's bar will be cranking out gallons upon gallons of traditional Mardi Gras cocktails as known for their savage potency as for their flavor. The best-known of these drinks is the Hurricane, a sweet and powerful red concoction of rum and mixed fruit juice that is a true New Orleans original. For the party, the price of a full cup of Hurricane will be cut from 45 yuan to just 20 yuan. Brave drinkers can order theirs with extra rum.

The bar will also be churning out plenty of less traditional, and perhaps less dangerous, cocktail options. Try the delicious and colorful Burning Blues (45 yuan), a mix of tequila, blue curacao and sugar syrup. Those ingredients and a healthy measure of ice are run together in a blender then served in a glass rimmed with sugar.

Another attractive drink is the Bayou Breeze (45 yuan), made from vodka, pineapple juice and cranberry juice. The finished cocktail has a



Hurricane



Burning Blues



Seabreeze, a classic cocktail



Bayou Breeze

beautiful hazy red hue and a refreshing flavor both sweet and bitter, a taste of warmer days on the horizon.

Where: No. 1 Nongzhanguang Lu (at the south gate of Chaoyang Park) **Open:** Tuesday, February 24, 7 pm - 2 am **Tel:** 6508 6776 **Admission:** 150 yuan per person for Mardi Gras party, includes free masks and hotdgos



Rusty Nail

of Workers' Stadium **Tel:** 6530 2978

Centro

A huge yet comfortable new spot that attracts the beautiful people and others with solid drinks and daily happy hours.

Where: First floor, Kerry Center Hotel, 1 Guanghua Lu, Chaoyang **Tel:** 6561 8833

Outback Steakhouse

Get a taste of Marty's own concoctions.

Where: First floor, Beijing Hotel, Dongcheng **Tel:** 6528 2858

Inside north gate of Workers' Stadium, Chaoyang **Tel:** 6506 6608

Mind Eraser
Photos by
Li Shuzhuan

Friday Festivities

By Chen Si

The Louisiana Restaurant in the Beijing Hilton Hotel, long recognized as one of the top Western restaurants in the city, will be holding a big party on Friday to celebrate the 50th birthday of the Beefsteak and Burgundy Club, an international group of steak and wine lovers. The event is an excellent opportunity to see why this restaurant has earned an enviable reputation for its New Orleans-inspired food and outstanding drinks.

Already in a festive mood, the restaurant's management was only too happy to share a few of their top-notch cocktail recipes with our readers. Cheers!

Cosmopolitan

1 measure vodka
1/2 measure Cointreau
1/3 measure fresh lime juice
2 measures cranberry juice

Shake all ingredients together well with ice, then strain into a cocktail glass and garnish with a slice of lemon.

Chocolate Bunny

1/2 measure vodka
1/2 measure Kahlua
1/2 measure creme de cacao
2 measures cream

Blend all ingredients together well and serve in a wine glass with two cherries slid onto the rim.

Champagne Cocktail

1/4 measure cognac
1/3 measure Grand Marnier

Pour cognac and Grand Marnier into a champagne flute, then top with a layer of sparkling wine.



Melon Ball



Dacheng Xiaoshi (Leaving Me, Loving You)

Travel

Round Tower on Great Wall — Beijing Hikers

A round tower sits atop a mountain at an end of the Great Wall, where one side of the peak actually overhanging the valley below. Such towers were used at the ends of stretches of the Wall where cliff faces were so sheer that construction could go no further. This tower was likely used as a lookout or a beacon site. The hike to the tower offers fantastic views the whole way, including views of the Miyun reservoir, but the broken, high steps along parts of the Wall make for a challenging ascent.

Where: pick up outside Starbucks Cafe at Lido Hotel **When:** Sunday, 8:30 am **Admission:** 200 yuan **Tel:** 13910025516

Excursion: Marco Polo Bridge and Wanping

This famed bridge and its hundreds of exquisitely carved lions, was praised highly by Qing emperors and Italian traveler Marco Polo, but now is best known as the site of the firing of the first shot in the Japanese invasion of China in 1937. Visitors can still appreciate its artistry, imperial inscriptions and see bullet holes that still pock-mark the walls of the nearby town Wanping.



Marco Polo Bridge

Movies



Sanda (Xanda)

Set in the near future, Xanda is the name of a modern form of martial arts featuring incredible speed and power born in China's heartland. Former fighter turned Xanda coach Tieh (Zhang Hongjun) relentlessly trains his son Lung (Zhao Zilong) to be the next champion. But after he is defeated by the reigning Xanda champion (Teng Jun), Lung turns to his friend Qiang (Sang Weilin), who fuses traditional kung fu with unorthodox Xanda training to cultivate the next champion. Directed by Marco Mak. In Mandarin.

Where: cinemas across town **When:** till February 29

Mama
The 1991 debut film of renowned director Zhang Yuan (*Green Tea*), adapted from a true story about a single mother and her mentally disabled son. In Mandarin.

Where: Hart Salon, 17 Sanlitun Nanjie (across from Dirty Nellie's), Chaoyang **When:** Saturday, 8 pm **Admission:** 30 yuan (includes one drink) **Tel:** 6504 6010

Lord of Rings: The Return of the King

As Frodo and Sam grow ever closer to Mount Doom on their mission to destroy the One Ring, unaware of the treachery of their guide, Gollum, the members of the former fellowship lead a final struggle to save Middle Earth in a great battle against the forces of Sauron outside the city of Minas Tirith. The closest the capital will get to a real screening any time soon.

Where: B2M, next to river in front of Ditan Park South Gate **When:** February 23, 8 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 6426 1091



Shouji (Cell Phone)

Popular TV host Yan Shouyi (Ge You) has it all: a great job, a loyal wife and a gorgeous young lover. He depends on his cell phone to keep his world organized. His life starts unraveling when he forgets his cell phone at home and his wife answers a call from his lover. His phone, once his most trusted accessory, betrays him and sends him deeper and deeper in a world of deception and lies. The lives of other people around him are also affected by their own cell phones, and more often than not in a negative way...

Where: Cherry Lane Movies, 29 Liangmaqiao Lu, Chaoyang **When:** Sunday, 8 pm **Admission:** 50 yuan **Tel:** 13901134745



Free Structure by Su Ming

Exhibition

Spring Prints

Six young print makers including Sun Huili, Su Ming and Wang Haiyan celebrate the coming of spring in lively works.

Where: New Millennium Art Gallery, second floor, Diyang Building, 2 Dongsanhuan Beilu **When:** February 25 – March 15, 9 am – 6 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 8453 6193

Dialogues and Definitions

Installations by British artist Martin Derbyshire, now a resident of Beijing.

Where: 798 Space, 4 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Dashanzi Art District **When:** February 21 – 27, 10 am – 6:30 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 6438 4862

Rhyme of Four Seasons

This show features a series of oil paintings depicting beautiful scenes from all four seasons influenced by traditional Chinese works and combining Eastern and Western aesthetic senses.

Where: Soka Art Center, room 101, building B, Tianhai Shangwu Dasha, 107 Dongs Beidajie **When:** till February 29, Tuesday – Sunday, 9 am – 5 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 6406 5477

Photos of Chinese Contemporary History

Henan Province native Wang Tong took up photography in 1987 and has since recorded many scenes from contemporary Chinese history that have affected his life. His works have been exhibited in the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

Where: 798 Photo Gallery, 4 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Dashanzi Art District **When:** till February 29, Tuesday – Sunday, 10 am – 6:30 pm **Admission:** free **Tel:** 6438 1784



In the search for love, it all comes down to instinct and people with similar feelings will find each other. In this tale of love and loss, Yue (Faye Wong) and Qian (Leon Lai) were once lovers, yet their passion lasted only a year and a half and then faded, without tears or anger. The sad end to the affair came almost too quietly... Directed by Raymond Yip, starring Faye Wong and Leon Lai. In Mandarin.

Where: cinemas across town
When: till February 29

Stage



Ballet: Jingwei

A modern ballet adapted from the ancient Chinese legend of Jingwei, a beautiful bird that vows to fill the ocean with stones and earth. Performed by the Tianjin Jinyao Ballet troupe, starring Tian Jingjing, Zhang Zongwen and Tian Chuan

Where: Poly Theater, first floor Poly Plaza, 14 Dongzhimen Nandajie **When:** February 21 – 24, 7:30 pm **Admission:** 80 – 580 **Tel:** 6500 1188

Drama: Beijing Nanyuan (North Street, South Yard)



This play tells several touching stories from an isolated community in Beijing hit hard by SARS last spring. Starring Zhu Xu, Lu Zhong, He Bing, Pu Cunxin and Yang Lixin.

Where: Capital Theater, 22 Wangfujing Dajie, Dongcheng **When:** February 20 – 22, 7:30 pm **Admission:** 80 – 280 yuan **Tel:** 6524 9847

Peking Opera Classics

The China Opera Theatre performs pieces from their extensive repertoire and some new works.

Where: Chang'an Grand Theater, 7 Jianguomen Dajie, Dongcheng **When:** till February 27, 7:30 pm **Admission:** 60 – 200 yuan **Tel:** 6510 1309



Baonuan Shengxiangshi (When One Gets Rich, He Gets in Trouble)

This fun production combines cross-talk with other comedic forms.

Where: Poly Theater, first floor Poly Plaza, 14 Dongzhimen Nandajie **When:** February 25 – 28, 7:30 pm **Admission:** 60 – 480 **Tel:** 6500 1188

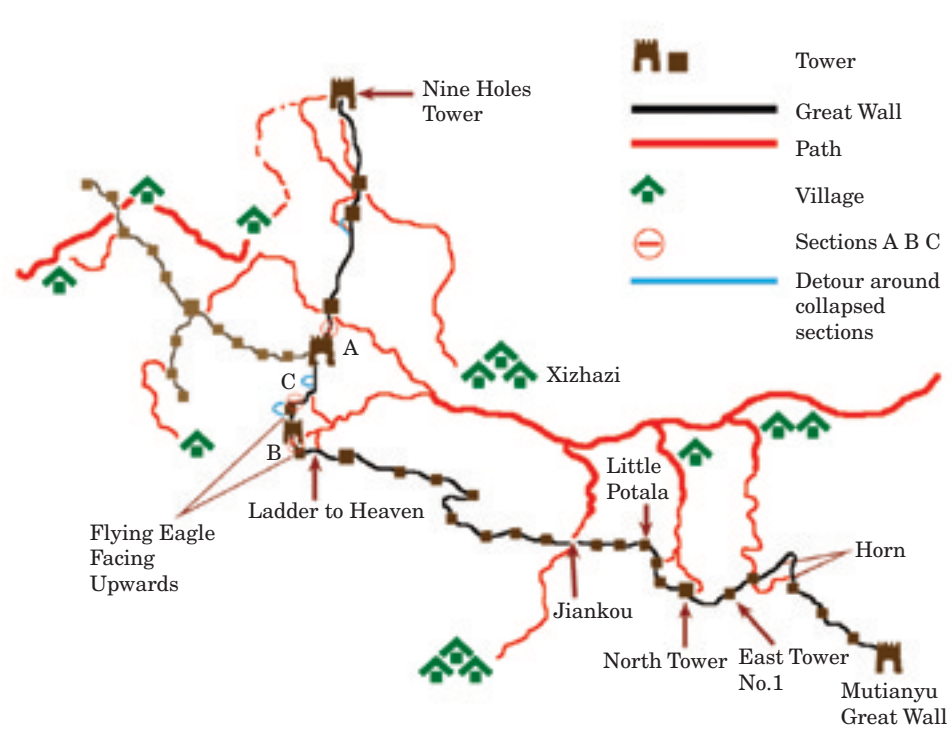


Music

China National Symphony Orchestra

A performance of Bellini's *Oboe Concerto*, Weber's *Clarinet Concerto No. 1*, and Elgar's *Enigma Variations*. Conducted by Li Xiaolu.

Where: National Library Concert Hall, 33 Zhongguancun Nandajie **When:** Saturday, 7:30 pm **Admission:** 50 – 380 yuan **Tel:** 6848 5462



Great Wall Spring Climb



By Wang Xiaoxiao

You don't always have to wait until all the flowers bloom for a spring outing. Although the thaw has only just begun and the mountains around Beijing are still gray and bare, now is a great time for climbing the Great Wall, and gray can be very photogenic!

The unrestored Jiankou Great Wall (箭扣长城) in Huairou District offers a variety of climbing options for Great Wall fans. Jiankou Great Wall is actually an extension of the better-known Mutianyu Great Wall (慕田峪长城) 10 kilometers away. But what makes Jiankou special is the fact that it is totally wild; the crumbling bricks are a constant reminder of its ancient history.

Climbing Jiankou requires not only plenty of energy but also a degree of courage. There are no nicely restored steps here, and certainly no chairlifts! If you want to get to the top, be prepared for some hard climbing up the mountain along narrow, crumbling paths. In some parts, where sections of wall have collapsed, walking along the ridge will prove a mission impossible for the faint-at-heart.

At the foot of the mountain is a village called Xizhazi (西栅子). This is where Jiankou adventures start from, as it is the nearest point to the wall that cars can reach. Although the wind at the foot of the mountain might seem dauntingly strong, don't be discouraged, because it will not be so bad further up, provided you've picked a good day! Anyway, don't burden yourself with too heavy clothing, because you face a good 30-minute climb just to get to the base of the wall.

As can be seen from the map, this is the north side of the mountain, and because it gets little direct sunlight, the snow has not melted yet and still covers the narrow paths. A sturdy pair of mountaineering boots, or at the very least, a pair of skid-proof shoes are essential, otherwise you will find the going next to impossible.

You can't see the panorama of Jiankou while climbing the mountain, but standing on the highest point

gives a truly spectacular view of the surrounding countryside. The famous beacon towers, known as Ying Fei Dao Yang (鹰飞倒仰) or Flying Eagle Facing Upwards, consist of three large beacon towers, two of which stand on the highest point of the mountain. The middle one stands a little lower than the others, so it looks like an eagle's head, while the two are the outspread wings.

East of Ying Fei Dao Yang is Tian Ti (天梯), or Ladder to Heaven, which is famous for its straight, almost 90-degree grade. At its narrowest point there is space only for a thin person to squeeze through. It is the longest stretch wall at Jiankou with such a continuously steep grade.

The big beacon tower facing Ying Fei Dao Yang in the north is Beijing Jie (北京结), or Beijing Knot, the point where three sections of wall intersect. The three sections extend respectively to Jiu Kong Lou (九孔楼), Nine Holes Tower – the end of the Jiankou Great Wall in Yanqing County, Xiangshuihu (响水湖), Ringing Lake and the remote Mutianyu Great Wall.

If you want to walk to every tower of Jiankou, you will need to spend longer than one day there. But this is no problem, as accommodation is available in the village at the foot of the mountain. Nongjiale or "spending a holiday in a peasant's house" sleeping on a heated kang is a good way of resting your aching limbs in preparation for the next day's assault on the mountain.

Camping is also an option in one of the many beacon towers along the wall, and some towers are just wide enough for a tent. A little later on in the year, it will be possible to sleep out with just a sleeping bag and moisture-proof mat, which lightens the burden considerably, but in February, a little more insulation is recommended.

Which ever part of the wall you decide to tackle, choosing the right path is essential. After centuries of exposure to the elements, many parts of the wall have collapsed and the steps have been reduced to broken bits of stone between dangerous precipices.



Photos by Sun Haitao

Getting there:

Drive toward Miyun along Jingmi Lu (京密路) until you come to the Kaifang Roundabout (开放环岛), turn left and then turn right at the first traffic light. Then turn left at the Yanxi Roundabout (雁栖环岛). From there it is 26.5 kilometers to a bridge where you will see a little shop with red roof and a sign saying "Shop" on the white wall on the right side. Turn left at the bridge and go a further 8 kilometers till you come to Xizhazi village.

Alternatively, take bus 916 or 936 from Dongzhimen, to Huairou (8 yuan), then hire a mini bus to go to Xizhazi. One mini bus can carry 20 passengers will cost around 150 yuan. If you are good at bargaining, you might even get it for less than that.

Tips:

Climbing up to and making your way along the wall requires abundant energy, don't attempt it on an empty stomach, and carry plenty of water with you, at least one or two liters per person.

Not all of the wall is walkable, to traverse some sections, detours will be necessary. Take your time and scout out your route carefully. Narrow paths can usually be found parallel to the wall. To get to Nine Holes Towers, for instance (see map), you will have to find your way around, rather than through, one of the beacon towers.

Wear good protective clothing, something that won't be torn (and will protect you from being torn) by the numerous thickets of branches and bushes that obstruct the narrow paths.

Also be sure to take plastic bags to bring your garbage back in. Take heed of the signs you see will along the roadside urging visitors to "Take Nothing But Photographs, Leave Nothing But Footprints, Keep the Wall Wild & Wonderful!" These were set up by William Lindesay, an Englishman who has been campaigning to protect the great wall since 1999.

Nearby Huairou is famous for its trout farms, so take the opportunity to try some fresh fish for dinner. A meal of baked trout is a delicious way to wrap up a Great Wall expedition.

If you plan to spend a night in the village, call Lao Zhao, on 61611762. Lao Zhao's house lies right at the foot of the mountain and he will help arrange your bed and meals.



Section	Direction	State	Difficulty
Ladder to Heaven	To Flying Eagle Facing Upwards south tower	Uphill, complete steps and walls, very narrow	You'll make it if you are brave enough!
Ladder to Heaven	From Flying Eagle Facing Upwards south tower	Downhill	Courage and confidence will help
Section A	To Beijing Knot	Uphill, steep, some incomplete steps and walls	Care is especially required
Section A	From Beijing Knot	Downhill	Fitness definitely required
Section B	To the Ladder to Heaven	Uphill, incomplete teps, intact wall	Fitness, flexibility and concentration needed
Section B	From the Ladder to Heaven	Downhill, steep	Strong arms and fingers will help, monkey-like agility definitely an advantage
Section C	To Flying eagle facing upwards north tower	Uphill, just a sheer cliff, steps and walls totally destroyed	Fitness plus a measure of intrepidness called for
Section C	From Flying eagle facing upwards north tower	Downhill	Mission impossible, forget it unless you fancy yourself as a Tom Cruise